

**A STUDY OF THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN
THE SERMONS OF JOHN WESLEY**

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TO MY WIFE, RUTH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the striking features of contemporary theological and ethical thought is its renewed interest in the study of man. With the rise of Barthian theology there was a perceptible shift in theology from man to God; that is, the liberal view of man which dominated European and, consequently, American theology and ethics during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been set aside for a view which more radically set apart God and man. However, in the past decade another shift had been charted; one that tends toward a celebration of the human, including at times an emphasis on the autonomy of man.¹

As a result of this new theological quest such writers as Robinson² and Cox³ now call our attention to the supposed inability of traditional God-language to communicate some viable form of faith to this modern man.

¹Cf. Roger L. Shinn, Man: The New Humanism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 19-49.

²John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), pp. 29-44.

³Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 241-68.

Perhaps the epitome of this critique is the so-called Death-of God theology which seems to endow man with new types of responsibility. So William Hamilton can write that the "human community" will now have to assume the role of the one who forgives, a role which once belonged only to the Deity.⁴ On the other hand, Albert Outler criticizes the movement by suggesting that

We know now what we only surmised before; that disbelief in traditional Christianity is now epidemic not merely among the intelligentsia but the literate mass as well. Modern man has finally laid claim to the autonomy that the Enlightenment pagans promised him long ago.⁵

The institutional church must now face a cry for relevancy based on the celebration of the secular--of the human. Reactions to the supposed otherworldliness of the church vary, all the way from utilizing "folk" worship to ministry completely outside the present structure. There is little hope that any church will be able to set aside easily the question about its right to speak about man to man. The question is, how will we view man and what will we say to him? Unfortunately--or fortunately, depending on one's view--we do not presently have a definitive

⁴William Hamilton, "The Death of God," Playboy, XIII:8 (August, 1966), 137.

⁵Albert C. Outler, Who Trusts in God (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 25-6.

Methodist theology from which to draw our answers. In fact, Chiles suggests that Methodism has lacked recognized theological leadership for at least a generation now.⁶

Not too long ago it might have seemed ludicrous to suggest the sermons of John Wesley as a foundation for a serious study of the possibilities of grace for man in the third quarter of the twentieth century, but that is no longer true. A revival of interest in Wesley studies began about fifteen years ago and, apparently, has been gaining increasing attention since.⁷ While there is a general trend among American churchmen to take seriously their several histories,⁸ it may be that the attempt to recover the genius of the Wesleyan message indicates the desire or need among American Methodists for theological identity. At least this is what was suggested in 1967 by the editor of Good News Magazine which calls itself "a forum for scriptural Christianity within the Methodist Church."

One of the great problems of modern Methodism is its unfamiliarity with Wesleyan understanding of the Christian faith, the Christian life and

⁶Robert E. Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), pp. 74-5.

⁷Ibid., p. 74.

⁸Carl Michalson, Worldly Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), pp. 16-17.

the Christian church. Ignoring the Wesleys, we Methodists are something like the man who wandered around the world in search of treasures, not realizing that acres of diamonds lay in his own backyard!⁹

This growing appreciation for a fresh look at Wesley is seen both in the Methodist Church and out of it. Certainly one of the leading voices in the church for a recovery of Wesley is Dr. Albert C. Outler of Southern Methodist University. In 1961, Outler wrote an article entitled "Toward a Re-appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian" in which he shared his opinion that Wesley is an important theological figure, an option which had not been seriously considered in America during the first half of the twentieth century except by small "Methodist" sects.¹⁰ This writer once heard Outler, while lecturing on Methodist history, speak with obvious concern about the probability that the Modern Methodist Church was filling its pulpits with men who had little, if any, orientation in their church's tradition. Recently Outler edited a book of selected writings by Wesley, topically

⁹"Listen to the Wesleys," Good News, I:1 (Winter, 1967), 42; for another perspective see, J. Robert Nelson, "As Others See Us: Methodist Theology," Christian Advocate, XIII:14 (July 10, 1969), 7f.

¹⁰Albert C. Outler, "Towards a Re-appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian," Perkins School of Theology Journal XIV:2, II (Winter, 1961), 13.

arranged with an introduction and helpful editorial comments.¹¹

More generally, with the changing theological emphases in American Methodism during the nineteenth century several groups left the mother church to establish their own "Methodist" bodies. These New Methodist churches were particularly concerned with keeping Wesley's theology in as pure a form as possible, especially the doctrine of Christian perfection. In recent years, however, some "holiness" leaders have begun to question whether their denominational interpretation of Wesley is as valid as their forefathers believed.¹² This inquiry has inaugurated some re-appraisals of current "holiness" theology resulting so far in a less doctrinaire view of Christian perfection, a new understanding of the Christian's social responsibility, an updating of theological language, and a call for "neo-Wesleyanism."¹³ This general interest was

¹¹John Wesley, John Wesley. Edited by Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

¹²George E. Failing, "Developments in Holiness Theology After Wesley," in Kenneth Geiger (ed.) Insights into Holiness (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1962), p. 11ff.

¹³Cf. Walter H. Johnson, "Needed--Neo-Wesleyanism," in Ibid., p. 283ff; Kenneth Geiger, The Word and the Doctrine (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1965), especially "Relevant Works and the Holiness Movement" by Donald E. Demaray (pp. 271-82) and the articles on social tensions (pp. 413-29).

heightened in 1965 by the formation of The Wesleyan Theological Society; a society dedicated to the ideal of exploring the "Wesleyan-Arminian" tradition.

Added to the fact of this rising interest in Wesley is the number of excellent books marked by American publishers on Wesley during the last fifteen years. These volumes have covered various aspects of Wesley's theology, including its background and historical importance. While the doctrine of Christian perfection has received a great deal of attention, yet significant studies have been done in Wesley's Christology and Pneumatology. Add to what has been published the as-yet unpublished doctoral dissertations on Wesley's theology and ethics--not to mention English works--and one is faced with a vast amount of literature.

Thus, there are many indications that the larger Methodist movement is gaining new perspectives on the teachings of its founder. Looking at the Wesleyan movement in the eighteenth century as containing a spirit of joy and enthusiasm not characteristic of neo-orthodox theology, Methodist theologian Claude Thompson of Candler School of Theology suggests,

If I read post 18th century history aright, the Evangelical Revival ultimately shook the forces of evil to their roots and, being utilized as a channel of divine grace, became the instrument of God's will in history. . . . It may be that what was regarded

as madness in the first century, and 'very horrid enthusiasm' in 18th century England must become 'the shaking of the foundations' in 20th century America . . . we now need a new evangelical voice to offer a power to lift up the fallen in a triumphant note of joy that God has again visited and redeemed his people.¹⁴

Another Methodist theologian, the late Carl Michalson, also sees Wesleyan emphases (particularly Christian holiness) as having a contemporary relevance for man.¹⁵

This present study will not suggest that we indulge in some kind of "imitative historizing"--to borrow a phrase from Ebeling--in order to catch Wesley's spirit. That is, we do not want to reenact the situation so as to bring it to us. Neither is there reason to look back to his day with its particular problems to seek a pattern for what we should do in our world. Least of all should we attempt to use Wesley in a "proof-text" approach, glibly throwing around outdated answers to contemporary questions.

However, the new interest today in the nature and destiny of man corresponds in part to Wesley's main concern; the proclamation of the possibilities of grace for man to man. It seems as though the sermons indicate that Wesley's purpose in preaching and writing was to lay out as clearly as he could God's scheme of redemption,

¹⁴Claude Thompson, "Aldersgate and the New Reformers," Christian Advocate, VI:10 (May 10, 1962), 8.

¹⁵Michalson, op. cit., pp. 127-58.

largely from the standpoint of man's nature and experience. That is, Wesley was interested in man; what he was, what he is, and what he can become. Further, Wesley tended to express this concern in terms of three theological motifs; creation, sin, and grace, or, in his terms, original sin, justification by faith, and holiness. At times he also referred to these three motifs as repentance, faith, and holiness.

These general concepts are found constantly in Wesley's sermons where they relate directly to man; more so than to, say, God, the Kingdom, et cetera. So, theologically one could say that Wesley's chief interest in the sermons is in an anthropologically-centered soteriology.

Purpose of the study. The aim of this study is to attempt to (1) analyse Wesley's view of man through a study of selected sermons, (2) understand Wesley's view of the possibilities of grace for man in the salvation process, (3) discover Wesley's view of the ethical obligations of faith, and (4) suggest what possible relevance Wesley's views have for the American church's situation.

Essentially we will attempt to understand Wesley's view of man from the standpoint of the sermons which is also to see how Wesley preached his convictions. The study will not attempt to deal extensively with the

theological traditions from which Wesley drew his views. Finally, this study will deal with the subject of man in his several relations (including himself, God, and his world), rather than the traditional, and somewhat restricting categories of creation and fall.

Justification of the problem. As mentioned above, a viable theological perspective, in terms of representing accurately the tension between tradition and contemporary theological concerns within the United Methodist Church, has yet to take shape. However, an adequate understanding of the relationship between one's tradition and one's involvement in the present situation is not always easily seen, but it is necessary that the attempt be made to see it. Selected writings of Wesley continue to be recognized as a part of the United Methodist Church's "present existing and established standards of doctrine." These standards are drawn from Wesley's forty-four Sermons on Several Occasions and Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament; to which, in 1808, the church added "The Articles of Religion." The position of the Wesleyan standards in the church is clearly described in the 1968 Methodist Book of Discipline.

Our concern is that these Wesleyan doctrinal traditions shall continue as a fruitful source of theological understanding. They make no pretension to infallibility in and of themselves.

Mr. Wesley constantly appealed to Scripture as the primary locus of divine revelation and to the historic creeds and 'the catholic spirit' as the larger context in which the Scriptures are to be interpreted. In like manner, the Wesleyan 'standards of doctrine' are designed to serve those who preach and teach in The United Methodist Church as sound guides to valid doctrine.¹⁸

This study of selected sermons of Wesley is made in the interest of helpfulness in the continuing process of clarifying one's theological tradition in the hope that it will have some practical relevance to the present ministries of the church.¹⁷ As mentioned previously, I am interested in the subject of man not only because it is important to Wesley, but also because it is one of the major topics of discussion today in the secular as well as the religious world. I am not so much interested in a study of the traditions from which Wesley derived his views, although such studies in theological origins are important and several have been done on various aspects of Wesley's thought, as I am in what he thought about man and in turn how he preached his ideas. It is hoped that such a study would serve the church in its attempt to contemporize its tradition, thus bringing its history and

¹⁶The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1968), pp. 36-7.

¹⁷The sermons used for this study are listed in Appendix A, p.

theology into a meaningful place in the lives of modern men.

A second reason for this study is related to my own interest in Wesley's ethics. It was more than a decade ago while serving a student pastorate in Texas that I first became interested in Wesley. Wrestling with the spiritual needs of a rural congregation brought attention to my own inadequacies for the task. In an attempt to gain some maturity and spiritual insight I read much in the literature of the "holiness" tradition, most of which was produced by nineteenth century Methodists. This quest eventually introduced me to Wesley's Plain Account of Christian Perfection, a book that helped solve some problems and create others. One frustration arose from the abundance of material attempting to convince the reader of the necessity of the experience of Christian perfection, but relatively little was said about the practical aspects of living the experience. For me, the practical result was that for years the subject, while not shelved, suffered some loss of attention.

In recent years, however, my academic preparation and professional vocation of teaching reopened the subject on a level of investigation that promised some clarification on the general subject. Believing that Wesley's basic view of the possible present perfectability of every

man is a valid working assumption of Christian experience and one that has deep Biblical roots, I approached the subject again with renewed enthusiasm. I discovered that although Wesley said much about the foundation of Christian ethics in the sermons, yet books related to Wesleyan ethics did not explore this material. In addition, there has been little attempt to this point to show the practical relationship of Wesley's ethics to the subject of Christian perfection. It was found that Wesley does not separate social and personal ethics and that his central concern was not for doctrinal correctness, but "faith working by love." Therefore, a study of Wesley's ethics in relation to the possibilities of grace for man as contained in the sermons will complement existing studies in Wesley's theology and ethics.

Organization of the dissertation. The structure of the dissertation revolves around the aim of this study. The chapter of introduction attempts to show the possible significance of such a study in Wesley to the modern church. Chapter II attempts to answer the question, "What is Man?" from Wesley's standpoint. It will serve as a foundation to the chapters which follow. In the second chapter the Wesleyan understanding of the scheme of redemption from the standpoint of man is given. It also gives some idea as to how Wesley preached these concerns,

that is, something of how he tried to persuade his listeners.

Chapter III focuses on Wesley's optimism concerning the extent of restoration possible for the man of faith. Having seen that all men have the divinely initiated prerogative of voluntarily embracing Christian faith, we see that the full image of God can be restored to man prior to the time of death. Therefore, this chapter attempts to spell out the relationship of Christian perfection to the life of love which Wesley sees as the basic style of the total Christian existence.

Chapter IV is concerned with the questions: How did Wesley preach ethical concerns? What did he expect as a legitimate reaction in the believer's life to the redeeming love of God? On the basis of these kinds of questions the sermons are studied from the standpoint of their possibilities for instruction in Christian obedience. Prior studies in Wesley's ethics often tend to link ethical responsibility to Christian perfection, an option that may not be as viable as it seems. That Wesley's ethical concern may have special significance in relation to Christian perfection is not questioned, but it can hardly as yet be said that the implications of that relationship have been spelled out.

Chapter V attempts to summarize Wesley's view of

man as discoverable in the sermons and suggests how this concept is relevant to the church today.

Sources of the study. The bulk of the material for chapters II-IV is drawn from the printed sermons of Wesley. There are one hundred forty-one sermons in the Thomas Jackson edition of Wesley's Works, fifty-three of which are also found in Sugden's two volume set of Standard Sermons. These sermons were carefully reviewed to ascertain their individual significance for this study. While each of the sermons in its own way either makes a particular point about Wesley's view of man or confirms the insights of other sermons, it is evident that not all bear equal weight in reference to the topic. Selection of the sermons utilized for this study was based on two concerns. First, the sampling of sermons should be large enough to assure enough material for an adequate study. It was concluded early that the theme of this study could not restrict itself, say, to the "standard sermons" alone (forty-four in number), since some of the most significant sermons for this subject are in the larger Works. Second, the sermons chosen should be concerned with the general sweep of Wesley's theological interests so the proper relation of the subject of man to the whole could be seen.

The final selection of sermons did include the forty-four standard sermons. The forty-four sermons were

a part of the original official standards of doctrine for the Methodist movement. Wesley later added nine other sermons in 1771, making a total of fifty-three. Whether or not the additional nine carry the same weight of authority in the church is not the concern of this investigation. The forty-four sermons are so arranged by Wesley to show his understanding of the salvation process. Of special significance for this study are the thirteen sermons by Wesley on Matthew's account of Jesus' "sermon on the mount." This series spells out the theological foundations for Wesley's ethics and is helpful in seeing how Wesley preached his ethical convictions.

A question might be raised as to how accurately the printed sermons reflect the actual style of Wesley's preaching. It is rather difficult to imagine Wesley preaching one of his theological sermons to a crowd of miners, for example. The printed sermons seem to have been designed by Wesley as vehicles to convey his doctrinal beliefs and, primarily for that reason, do not necessarily furnish us with his normal preaching style. As Doughty suggests, the printed sermons do give us insight as to the fundamental subjects of importance to Wesley.¹⁸ While it is impossible to get an accurate count of the

¹⁸W. L. Doughty, John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 160f.

number of times Wesley preached on any of the themes of the printed sermons, yet it can be suggested that the information available on the forty-four sermons, for example, tend to show us which ones were dominant in Wesley's mind. Of the forty-four sermons, only seven are recorded as having been preached ten times or more.¹⁹ Of these seven, four are specifically concerned with the life of holiness, its significance and responsibilities. These four sermons are: "The Wilderness State," "Self-Denial," "The Cure of Evil-Speaking," and "The Use of Money." It is significant that so many of the more popular subjects Wesley dealt with are concerned with the idea of Christian obedience.

Occasional references will be made to other Wesley sources, i.e. the Letters, Journals, tracts, et cetera. The tracts are important as they relate directly to Wesley's ethical concern. Wesley wrote these short papers for many different situations, almost all of which were attempts on his part to correct what he considered as moral wrongs. Wesley's commentary, Explanatory Notes Upon

¹⁹The seven sermons are: "The Marks of the New Birth" (10), "Original Sin" (14), "The New Birth" (24), "The Wilderness State" (36), "Self-Denial" (11), "The Cure of Evil-Speaking" (26), and "The Use of Money" (21). Of the sermons added to the forty-four by Wesley only the sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (17) was preached more than ten times. This sermon serves as an overview of the salvation-process in Wesley's thought and, for that reason, is very important in a study of man.

the New Testament, is important for theological insights. Further study could profitably be made in the Notes as concerns Wesley's general theological interest in the salvation-process. Secondary sources will be used in places where they might make a contribution to the basic intention of the study.

Assumptions of the study. Wesley's interest in theology was pragmatic rather than speculative. He was not interested in the study of theology for its own sake. The discipline of theology entailed for him the attempt to articulate the details of man's experience of the Biblical message of God's grace. His attempt to see Christian faith in terms of three basic doctrines--original sin, justification by faith, and holiness--is typical of his desire to deal with "essentials" rather than "opinions." Even in the details of the "essentials" he was willing to allow for differences, since he believed that the proper intellectual comprehension of a doctrine was not always necessary in order to experience what the concept represented. This is not to say, of course, that Wesley was unconcerned about theology since Christian faith has a content as well as an experience. But Wesley did tend to "think and let think" so long as one's views did not blatantly contradict the obvious meaning of Scripture and/or cause a disturbance in the society.

A study of Wesley's view of man reflects the trend of his theological concern. His interest in man was primarily evangelistic, that is, what theological structure is derived from the sermons tends to revolve around the concepts, broadly speaking, of judgment, grace, and obedience, which, as we have seen, complement the doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, and holiness. Such ideas as whether man's nature is dichotomous (having two parts) or trichotomous (having three parts), the origin of souls, et cetera, have only peripheral relevance for Wesley's main thrust, the "saving of souls." Our first assumption then is that Wesley's "folk theology" of man was concerned more with practices than systematics.

Secondly, it is assumed that preaching held a place of great importance for Wesley. By this we do not mean that Wesley was a particularly gifted speaker. Probably the greatest preacher, in terms of oral style, in eighteenth century England was George Whitefield,²⁰ a fact which Wesley acknowledged.²¹ Gill suggests that Charles was actually a better speaker than John and quite an

²⁰Cf. Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), pp. 132-33.

²¹Works, VI, 174f.

evangelist in his own right.²² McConnell is probably correct when he says that the genius of Wesley was really in his organizational ability.²³ However, it can be said that Wesley was first of all a preacher of the Gospel. While he may have had some weaknesses in natural ability, his strengths were evident in his enthusiasm and sense of purpose. Wood has certainly caught the spirit of Wesley when he says, "Wesley was first and foremost an evangelist, and as such he was aware that his commission was to preach the gospel."²⁴ Wesley's objective became the reformation of the continent and the church by spreading "scriptural holiness" across the land.²⁵ The means to that end became preaching (field-preaching and the establishment of preaching houses) and the use of the society.

In addition to his preaching, Wesley did a great deal of writing. Aside from the printed sermons, the "tracts" and the Notes were Wesley's main vehicles for

²²Frederick C. Gill, Charles Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 230.

²³Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 122f.

²⁴A. Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 147.

²⁵Works, VIII, 299. Wesley's American counterpart, Francis Asbury, had the same goal. Cf. Francis Asbury, The Journals and Letters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), III, 84.

communicating his theological and ethical ideas. His two most significant theological works, aside from the sermons, were done on the concepts of original sin and Christian perfection. It was in the sermons, however, that Wesley developed his understanding of the salvation-process. The sermons were usually written, edited, re-written and then published as theological and ethical pieces. It seems that Wesley's use of the sermon form in communicating theological and ethical concerns indicates his desire to keep these themes practical. While the printed sermons are often denuded of illustrative material, yet the conclusions still echo Wesley's conviction that man must make a decision when faced with the demands of God. Therefore, the sermons were expected to arouse the desire for repentance and faith as well as to instruct in the rudiments of Christian faith.²⁶

To announce a study in Wesley's sermons indicates at the outset a limitation of scope. There is much in Wesley's writings that reflect directly on the subject of this present study. This literature has not been overlooked, as references will demonstrate, yet neither has the writer assumed that his treatment of Wesley's view of

²⁶The four major objectives in preaching for Wesley were (1) to convict, (2) to convince, (3) to offer Christ, and (4) to build up. Cf. Wesley, John Wesley, p. 144.

man is exhaustive. The aim of the dissertation reflects an attempt to link together theological and practical matters disclosed in the printed sermons. In this light it is hoped that Wesley's voice might be heard yet another day.

CHAPTER II

WESLEY'S VIEW OF THE NATURE OF MAN IN THE SERMONS

The principal subject of Wesley's sermons is man. While Wesley is concerned with the whole man in his total relationship to his culture, yet the predominant theme of the sermons revolves around man's sensitivity--or lack of it--to the spiritual world. Thus, of all of the possible perspectives from which Wesley could view man, his own experience and commitments lead him to see man as being, first of all, a spiritual being, a being whose potential for temporal and eternal happiness is realized in relation to a right apprehension of himself, God, and mankind in general. Operating from the standpoint that man is essentially a spiritual being, it is not surprising then that Wesley attempts to understand mankind in relation to certain spiritual criteria; namely, in terms of degrees of spiritual sensitivity thought of primarily from the Christian point of view. One of the clearest expressions of Wesley's view of the division of mankind into groups based on these criteria is found in his sermon, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption."¹ In this sermon Wesley says that every man exists in one of three

¹Sermons, I, 194-5.

different spiritual states; the natural, the legal, and the evangelical.² While he readily admits that such divisions or "states" of existence often overlap or blend together at certain points, still he finds it a convenient and suitable manner of looking at the family of man.

Consonant with his general view of the nature of man is his understanding of the process of restoration, which complements the ends for which Wesley believes man exists. It is possible to see the larger motifs of this redemptive scheme in some sort of parallel to these three states of thought.³ In fact, it is the setting forth of

²Wesley is rather consistent in dividing mankind into three categories. In "The Good Steward" these categories are called "debtor," "servant," and "steward" (Works, VI, 136). The "circle" of divine providence is likewise concerned with three groups; namely, the whole race of man, those that are called Christians, and "real" Christians (Works, VI, 318-20; cf. "On Faith," Works, VII, 196ff. where Wesley discusses the faith of a materialist, a Deist, a heathen, a Jew, a Protestant, and a Methodist). Wesley considers his own pre-Aldersgate experiences to have been conducted by the faith of a "servant" and only after Aldersgate did he have the faith of a "son." (Journal, I, 423-4). Even the "marks" or characteristics of the Christian life are three: faith (the new birth), hope (the witness of the Spirit), and love (the life of holiness)--cf. Sermons, I, 280ff.

³As we have indicated above (p. 8), Wesley states that Methodists have three fundamental doctrines, i.e., repentance, faith, and holiness (Letters, II, 268; cf. John S. Simon, John Wesley the Master Builder (London: Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 152-3, where these doctrines are referred to as "original sin," "justification by faith," and "holiness of life.") While it is possible to pair off the natural man and original sin, the legal

this divinely conceived redemptive plan for man which concerns Wesley in the printed sermons. Therefore, it will be the aim of this chapter to (1) briefly describe the three states of mankind as Wesley sees them, (2) attempt to correlate the several motifs of the redeeming or restoring process with their appropriate relationship to the three states, and (3) to attempt to see how Wesley proclaims these motifs so as to persuade his hearers to act in accordance with the offer of redemption in the Gospel.

THE NATURAL MAN

Wesley has few words of appreciation for the natural man and none of comfort. For Wesley, the natural man is in a most perilous condition as concerns the state of his soul due to his complete lack of authentic spiritual sensitivity. For all practical purposes he can be classified as an atheist because his life has no meaningful reference to God. He neither fears nor loves the Deity.⁴ Thus,

man and justification by faith, and the evangelical man and holiness of life, this present study will attempt to see Wesley's view of the three "states" of man in conjunction with his ideas on creation, free-will, the nature of God, history, re-creation, and community as they find expression in the sermons.

⁴Works, VI, 25.

The darkness which covers him on every side, keeps him in a kind of peace; so far as peace can consist with the works of the devil, and with an earthly devilish mind. He sees not that he stands on the edge of the pit, therefore he fears it not. He cannot tremble at the danger he does not know. He has not understanding enough to fear.⁵

Such a man might be a learned man or even a professed Christian, but Wesley is not interested with either the degree of any man's intellectual capability⁶ or a particular brand of orthodoxy or morality.⁷ For all his sense of personal achievement or ability the natural man has no real faith, sins willingly, is far from the Kingdom, and is best typified by the "heathen."⁸ For Wesley, this character represents the general condition of the human

⁵Sermons, I, 182; emphasis is Wesley's. In the sermon "On Living Without God" Wesley compares the natural man to a toad which he heard about that was found alive embedded in a tree trunk. Wesley generously suggests that the toad had been lodged in its living tomb for perhaps a century. The point is that natural men are living in a restricted world by their inability to perceive spiritual values and relationships. While the analogy is shaky, the point is well made. Cf. Works, VII, 349-52.

⁶Works, VII, 37-38.

⁷Works, VI, 276f.; cf. Works, VII, 269f.

⁸By "heathen" Wesley means "modern" as opposed to "ancient" heathen. The difference between the two being that the ancient heathen had no opportunity to hear of the saving grace of Christ. Wesley hopes for the best for this man, believing he will be judged in accordance with whatever natural revelation (Works, VII, 258) or inward voice (of natural conscience; Works, VI, 196) was available to his understanding (Works, VI, 347-8). On the other hand, the modern heathen is the man who has the opportunity to hear but does not avail himself of it.

race. Thus, man is a wilful sinner.

Creation. For Wesley the present condition of man is, however, in stark contrast to his original nature. In keeping with the first chapter of Genesis, Wesley posits that the first man was made in the divine image, an image which meant that man at that time was a finite reflection of God. The essence of the image, then and now, is spiritualness, as opposed to physicalness.⁹ The image consists of three parts; the "natural image" having spirituality, understanding, will, and liberty,¹⁰ the "moral image" consisting of righteousness and true holiness,¹¹ and the "political image" in that man was governor of the garden in much the same sense that God governs the universe.¹²

This general view coincides with Wesley's belief that the Biblical message is essentially addressed to hearers and not to those who for the want of circumstances cannot hear (cf. Letters, VIII, 179).

⁹Works, VI, 171. Wesley believes that the Genesis account of man does not include a "bodily image," an assumption which recent Old Testament scholarship would question. Cf. Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), II, 144f.

¹⁰Works, VI, 222; Sermons, II, 228; Works, VII, 226-8; Works, V, 436; Works, VI, 242-4.

¹¹Works, VI, 222-3; Sermons, II, 228; Works, VI, 270; Works, VII, 365.

¹²Sermons, II, 228.

The image of God was reflected by man in the garden largely in terms of obedience. Man obeyed because of who and what he was, a creation of God that could voluntarily carry out the Creator's commands. God's covenant with man was based on command and fulfillment, that is, a covenant of works which was kept perfectly by man until the fall.¹³

The excellence of Adam's nature suffered a serious blow with the event of the fall. It is at this point we see one of Wesley's "essentials" of Christian faith, the belief in original sin which stands for him as the "ground" of Christ's redemptive work.¹⁴ Wesley avoids the possible temptation to speculate on what might have happened had man not sinned. The tragedy is that in the face of every possible incentive to continued obedience he did sin. The immediate--and lasting--results of man's fall were fourfold. First, the moral image of God in man was totally ruined.¹⁵ Man was left destitute of goodness.

¹³Lawson suggests that Wesley's use of the concept of "covenant of works" in his sermon, "The Righteousness of Faith," was in keeping with its use by seventeenth century theologians. John Lawson, Notes on Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons (London: Epworth Press, 1952), pp. 55-6. Cf John Deschner, Wesley's Christology (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), pp. 112-14.

¹⁴Works, VI, 239. Wesley suggests that the concept of original sin distinguishes Christianity from heathenism. Sermons, II, 222.

¹⁵Works, VI, 223.

All of the godlike characteristics of his nature were stripped away by the results of his choice; which itself was based on pride stemming from unbelief.¹⁶ Second, that part of the natural image (knowledge) which enabled man to apprehend God was also ruined.¹⁷ Third, man suffered a loss of happiness, being deprived of the presence of God.¹⁸ Fourth, spiritual and physical death entered into the world as a result of disobedience.¹⁹

Thus, the intensity of the change in human nature which followed the fall altered both man's body and his spirit. In his sermon "The Fall of Man" Wesley states that man's body tends to be corruptible and is now a hindrance to holiness (or the attainment of the moral image).²⁰ What service it does render to the soul of man is imperfect since it tends to make mistakes. In addition, man's sin not only affects himself at this point, but all of the created order as well since man in the garden was a channel of God's blessing to creation. Concerning this "brute creation" Wesley says,

¹⁶Works, VI, 217; Works, VII, 338; Sermons, II, 229.

¹⁷Works, VI, 223.

¹⁸Works, VI, 215f.

¹⁹Works, VI, 231. In Adam "all died," Sermons, II, 230.

²⁰Works, VI, 219.

As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off. The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped those blessings could no longer flow in upon them.²¹

Concerning the spirit of man the devastation of the fall was even worse. The "image of Satan" replaced the image of God in man. This new image consisted of pride and self-will as opposed to the now lost state of holiness.²² Wesley even suggests that now there are some things in which fallen man's interest supersedes that of Satan himself; for example, in love of the world, the desire for pleasure, and the desire for praise.²³ Therefore the moral image being completely effaced, man is now totally evil within or, as Wesley says, "in every faculty of his soul, not so much by those particular vices which reign in particular persons, as by the general flood of Atheism and idolatry, of pride, self-will, and love of the world."²⁴ There is little wonder then that man cannot naturally know God, seeing that his moral nature is evil "without any mixture of good."²⁵

²¹Works, VI, 245; cf. Notes, on Romans 8:19-22.

²²Sermons, II, 218; cf. Works, V, 59.

²³Sermons, II, 219-21.

²⁴ Sermons, II, 222.

²⁵Sermons, II, 214.

The disease of original sin is so pervasive that it not only infects the spirit of man, but finds expression in his daily experience.²⁶ For example, man's fallen image means a loss of happiness, which ultimately results in "pain" in the world. In addition, there is rebellion in the world, part of which is directed toward God and part to man (especially notorious in war).²⁷ This, too, comes as a result of man's fallenness. The height of folly is that in spite of these observable results of the defects in man's character he deceives himself into thinking he is basically a good creature.²⁸ Thus, because of the blinding character of sin--inward and outward--man is liable to the wrath of God.²⁹

As the total event of creation brought order out of chaos, the fall, in turn, toppled the best of creation. So warped is man's understanding that an adequate comprehension of his place in the general scheme of things can only come with the help of revelation, an unveiling that will enable him to once again be restored to his place of

²⁶Sermons, II, 215; Works, VI, 223.

²⁷Works, VII, 340.

²⁸Sermons, II, 211; Works, VII, 339.

²⁹Man's warped "intention" (Sermons, II, 212-3, 215) causes him to seek goals other than those that would please God (Works, VII, 229-30; cf. Sermons, I, 333 on natural man's ultimate destination, i.e., hell).

glory.³⁰ Yet Wesley refuses to view the fall of man (and consequently man's continuing plight³¹) in a totally negative light. Certainly the garden existence of man was good.³² God cannot be blamed for man's voluntary choice to exercise his will against the Deity's,³³ even though He in fact foreknew what would happen.³⁴ Yet, the fall will actually work for the ultimate benefit of man, as we will see later, for it is an example of God's mercy as well as His judgment.³⁵

Free-will. Wesley's sermonic appeals are based on the presupposition that God created man a free and intelligent being, "endued with the power to choose good or evil."³⁶ Such privilege and responsibility constitutes

³⁰Sermons, I, 179-80, 194; Works, VII, 342.

³¹In that Adam was a representative of the race. Works, V, 56.

³²Works, VI, 206-7, 213.

³³Works, VI, 214-5.

³⁴Works, VI, 226-7. Wesley certainly falls within traditional orthodoxy at this point. For example, compare Wesley's view with that of Augustine. Cf. Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), I, 342.

³⁵Immediately in the judgments on the first pair (Works, VI, 218) and ultimately with regard to the restoration of man (cf. Sermons, II, 225; Works, VI, 224).

³⁶Works, V, 436.

part of the "natural image" of God as originally given to man.³⁷ This accounts in part for man's loss of paradise in the garden. However, when Adam fell from his original state of perfection he did not totally lose this aspect of his being. Although still free to choose, man's ability to do so has been seriously impaired in that the natural knowledge of God enjoyed by original man has been destroyed. Now man no longer had a referent for God based on a type of intuitive apprehension of the divine. It is now God acting in love, in this dispensation of grace, that restores to man even the most elemental intuitive knowledge of, longing for, or capacity of experiencing God. What God has done for man in this regard Wesley calls "prevenient grace."

³⁷In his tract, "Predestination Calmly Considered," Wesley briefly defines "free-will" as follows: ". . . I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which enlightens every man that cometh into the world" (Works, X, 229-30; cf. comments in Lawson, op. cit., pp. 81-2). Strictly speaking, this free-will, as described above, relates to "liberty" (freedom of choice) rather than specifically to the "will." The will of man includes emotional faculties and is thus related to the soul. Wesley further distinguishes these (will and liberty) from the "understanding" of man, which thinks, judges, and reasons (see Wesley's discussion of this problem in Works, VI, 222; Works, VII, 226-8). Cf. Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 53f. Notwithstanding Wesley's fine distinctions, his general appeals in the sermons are simply stated in the confidence that man can hear the gospel and repent.

In describing the function of "preventing grace" Wesley says,

No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed, preventing grace. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root, or produce any considerable fruit. Every one has some measure of that light. . . . And every one . . . feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace but because he does not use the grace which he has.³⁸

Wesley prefers the term "preventing grace" to "natural conscience" since prevenient grace indicates both the extent of man's ruin and the love of God. So, actually natural conscience is not natural to man now, but is rather a "supernatural gift of God."³⁹ Nevertheless, man is responsible for acting in accord with the impressions he receives from his partially restored conscience. Unless completely hindered by habitual sin, man's conscience has a threefold office: (1) to act as a

³⁸Works, VI, 512.

³⁹Works, VII, 187. This partial restoration of conscience is important for Wesley's view of the role of reason. Reason, properly understood, cannot produce saving faith, but is always consistent with it. When reason is coupled with faith then its proper role is one of confirming the sensibleness of religion (Works, VI, 355ff.). When the gospel is preached and the conscience is awakened it becomes reasonable to believe and unreasonable to reject the gift of forgiveness. Cf. Williams, op. cit., p. 30f.

witness to his thoughts and actions; (2) to act as a judge, approving or disapproving his actions; (3) to partially execute any sentence due him by his actions, for example, personal remorse, uneasiness, et cetera.

In the sermons Wesley is eager to impress his reader with the responsibility placed on him by his essential free-will. If God has enabled man to respond positively to the gospel's demands for faith and obedience, then man cannot deliberately delay his decision making or, in some cases, rest on some deterministic concept like Calvinistic predestination.⁴⁰ God has elected the means (faith) and the end (eternal life) of the salvation-process, but not the destiny of any particular man.⁴¹ In his present condition man is aided by preventing grace to the extent that he can exercise free will in relation to his understanding of the significance of Christian faith. The actual choice which sets in motion man's faith or unfaith comes as a result of man's free decision. However, as man did have a special advantage in the garden which

⁴⁰Works, VII, 375f.; Notes, on I Peter 1:2, pp. 872-3.

⁴¹Works, VI, 227. God is certainly aware of the destinies of men, but from the standpoint of foreknowledge, not election. Cf. John Wesley, John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 425ff. Concerning Wesley's deletion of predestinarian concepts from Puritan authors, cf. Robert Monk, John Wesley: (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 55-6; also Notes, on Ephesians 1:5, 11; pp. 703-4.

aided proper choices, in this dispensation of grace God has as well freely given man several helps to aid in making the proper choice, for example, revelation in nature, natural conscience (preventing grace), the role of reason, and the gospel message.⁴² For man to refuse to hear God's call is to reject great light. It is a rejection of one's true destiny and an affront to God as Creator and Redeemer. For man to accept God's love, however, is itself a reflection of God's love and sovereignty, not man's ability, whether divinely aided or not.⁴³

Preaching to the natural man. An overview of those sermons that are in large part directed toward the natural man indicates that Wesley is interested in conveying four basic ideas, although not all in equal measure in every sermon. First, Wesley attempts to help his hearer recognize his true condition, to know himself. From Wesley's standpoint, man's problem is really twofold; he is a sinner, but fails to understand the degree of his sin. In

⁴²Wesley's sermon "On Divine Providence" describes God's providential care in terms of three concentric circles showing degrees of God's general and special providence which indicate that the more man becomes disposed to recognize God in his life the more pronounced are his perceptions that God's providential care is extended him. Works, VI, 319-20.

⁴³Works, VI, 508. This point was not always understood by Wesley's critics. Cf. Albert M. Lyles, Methodism Mocked (London: Epworth Press, 1960), p. 49f.

fact, so deadening is the effect of sin on the natural man that only "some awful providence" or the impact of the preached word ("the word applied") is powerful enough to awaken him.⁴⁴

A good example of an appeal based on the idea of self-understanding is found in the sermon, "On Living Without God." Wesley says in conclusion,

Let me intreat all of you who are still 'without God in the world,' to consider that, with all your humanity, benevolence, and virtue, you are still

Inclosed in darkness and infernal shade.

My dear friends! you do not see God. You do not see the Sun of righteousness. You have no fellowship with the Father, or with His Son Jesus Christ. You never heard the voice that raiseth the dead. Ye know not the voice of your Shepherd. Ye have not received the Holy Ghost. Ye have no spiritual senses. You have your old, material ideas, passions, joys, and fears; you are not new creatures. O cry to God, that He may rend the veil which is still upon your hearts; and which gives you occasion to complain,--

O dark, dark, dark, I still must say,
Amidst the blaze of gospel-day!

O that you may this day hear his voice, who speaketh as never man spake, saying, 'Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!' Is it not his voice that crieth aloud, 'Look unto me, and be thou saved?' He saith 'Lo, I I come!' 'Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!'⁴⁵

⁴⁴Sermons, I, 185ff.

⁴⁵Works, VII, 354. Emphasis is Wesley's.

Man needs to be "born again" or converted in order to overcome the problem of sin.⁴⁶ Thus, man's radical wrongness in character and conduct can only be righted by personal commitment to Christ; the first step of which is to see oneself as God sees him, as a sinner. This appeal is based on Wesley's view of original sin and is found in some form in every sermon. Wesley attempts to avoid any possibility of man thinking himself acceptable to God on any other condition than that of repentant sinner. However, having informed his listener as to his true condition Wesley leaves the responsibility of choice with the hearer.⁴⁷

The second general appeal Wesley makes to the natural man is for him to become God-conscious. The hearer is to see God primarily in the role of judge and, as a result, is to fear God. In the sermon, "The Great Assize," for example, Wesley begins his conclusion with a rather vivid description of the final judgment. Concerning the one who will judge (God in Christ) he says,

See! See! He cometh! He maketh the clouds
his chariots! He rideth upon the wings of the
wind! A devouring fire goeth before him, and

⁴⁶Sermons, II, 235ff.

⁴⁷Works, VI, 240; cf. Wesley's final appeal in the sermon "Justification by Faith" where he hammers away at this sense of personal responsibility.

after him a flame burneth! See! He sitteth upon his throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold, his eyes are as a flame of fire, his voice as the sound of many waters! How will ye escape?⁴⁸

Clearly Wesley's general appeal in this sermon is based on the fear of meeting God unprepared. Here Wesley plays with the idea of death and man's wasted opportunities.⁴⁹

Wesley does not, however, always appeal to this God-awareness from a negative standpoint. For example, God has graciously prepared the way of return for sinful man. That is, God has done for man what he could not possibly do for himself. Thus, God is love. "He will have mercy," Wesley says, "not because thou art worthy of it, but because His compassions fail not; not because thou art righteous, but because Jesus Christ hath atoned for thy sins."⁵⁰ In "The Wedding Garment" Wesley ends his sermon by emphasizing God's love and man's responsibility to that love. Speaking of God's love he says,

The sum of all is this: The God of life is willing to save all the souls that he has made. This he has proclaimed to them in his word, together with the terms of salvation, revealed by the Son of his love, who gave his own life that they that believe in him might have

⁴⁸Works, V, 184.

⁴⁹Cf. "On Worldly Folly," Wesley's final appeal, Works, VII, 310-11.

⁵⁰Sermons, I, 145.

everlasting life. And for these he has prepared a kingdom, from the foundation of the world.⁵¹

The third idea that Wesley attempts to instill in the mind of the natural man is that sin, if persisted in, will eventually lead to hell. Typical of the orthodoxy of his day, Wesley was very much of a literalist with respect to his view of hell. Wesley's sermon "Of Hell" is a description of the horrors of hell based on his interpretation of Mark 9:48, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," In his conclusion Wesley says,

Are you tempted by pain, either of body or mind? O compare present things with future! What is the pain of the body which you do or may endure, to that of lying in a lake of fire with brimstone? What is any pain of mind; any fear, anguish, sorrow, compared to the 'worm that never dieth?' That never dieth! This is the sting of all! As for our pains on earth, blessed be God, they are not eternal. There are some intervals to relieve and there is some period to finish them. When we ask a friend that is sick, how he does; 'I am in pain now,' he says, 'but I hope to be easy soon.' This is a sweet mitigation of the present uneasiness. But how dreadful would his case be if he should answer, 'I am all over pain, and I shall be never eased of it. I lie under exquisite torment of body, and horror of soul; and I shall feel it for ever!' Such is the case of the damned sinners in hell. Suffer any pain, then, rather than come into that place of torment.⁵²

Of course, the appeal to even the possibility of

⁵¹Works, VII, 317. Wesley has a similar appeal based on God's love and willingness to restore to those who have lost the faith in "A Call to Backsliders." Cf. Works, VI, 526-7.

⁵²Works, VI, 390-1.

eternal existence in hell is an appeal to fear. In the sermon "The Important Question," however, Wesley sets the eternal alternative between heaven and hell before his hearer and calls for a decision based, for the most part, on reason and common sense.⁵³ Notwithstanding Wesley's literalism, he does not use such subjects as judgment and hell to threaten his congregations.⁵⁴ Rather, as Wood suggests, ". . . the ultimate appeal [of Wesley's preaching] was not to the instinct of fear but rather to the magnetism of love."⁵⁵ But Wesley is firmly convinced that one's view of life beyond death is an incentive to faithfulness in the life of the believer and as an aid in the conviction of the sinner.⁵⁶ Preaching on hell is definitely a minor theme for Wesley except as it relates to the "saving of souls." Wesley's primary concern is to preach the grace of God.

Fourthly, Wesley sometimes attempts to help his audience realize what might be called the "scheme of things." This reflects in part Wesley's view of the

⁵³Works, VI, 505.

⁵⁴Lawson, op. cit., p. 20; cf. J.H. Whitely, Wesley's England (London: Epworth Press, 1954), p. 318.

⁵⁵A. Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 277.

⁵⁶Sermons, I, 408; Sermons, II, 198; Works, VI, 463.

purposefulness of history and the meaning of the Christian hope. Speaking of the "general scheme running through time into eternity," Wesley concludes a sermon by saying,

'According to the counsel of his own will,' the plan he had laid before the foundation of the world, he created the parent of all mankind in his own image; and he permitted all men to be made sinners, by the disobedience of this one man, that, by the obedience of one, all who receive the free gift may be infinitely holier and happier to all eternity.⁵⁷

In one of his sermons on "What is Man?" Wesley appeals to man's ability to determine his life's worth relative to the scheme of things.

And let it be observed, as this is the end, so it is the whole and sole end, for which every man upon the face of the earth, for which every one of you, were brought into the world, and endued with a living soul. Remember! You were born for nothing else. You live for nothing else. Your life is continued to you upon earth, for no other purpose than this, that you may know, love, and serve God on earth, and enjoy him to all eternity. Consider! You were not created to please your senses, to gratify your imagination, to gain money, or the praise of men; to seek happiness in any created good, in anything under the sun. All this is 'walking in a vain shadow;' it is leading a restless, miserable life, in order to a miserable eternity. On the contrary, you were created for this, and for no other purpose, by seeking and finding happiness in God on earth, to secure the glory of God in heaven.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Works, VI, 240.

⁵⁸Works, VII, 230; cf. "Spiritual Worship," Works, VI, 434-5, where the appeal is based on true happiness, here and hereafter, as found in God.

THE LEGAL MAN

Wesley's view of the "legal man" is less clear than either that of the natural or evangelical man. It may well be that this general category reflects in large measure his own early spiritual experiences. Yet it is difficult to conclude that Wesley's experiences from 1725 (ordination) to 1738 (Aldersgate) reflect his understanding of the legal man. During this period he was very much in earnest about his view of the Christian faith and ethical responsibility. By his own admission, however, Aldersgate did signify a new dimension or clarification of the nature of Christian faith for him.⁵⁹ Cannon sees this new experience also reflected in Wesley's subsequent theology.

To be sure, the Aldersgate experience modified his theology; for it shifted the emphasis from self to God. . . . It did not abrogate the requirements of the moral law, however, as regards either external or internal holiness, but rather it

⁵⁹ Exactly what occurred at Aldersgate has occasioned much debate among Wesley scholars. The reader is directed to the following materials for much of this debate. Cf. Wood, op. cit., pp. 68-9, for a brief summary of the various views. Unfortunately Wood credits Outler with 1738 as the date of Wesley's conversion, whereas Outler suggests 1725 as the year for that event (Wesley, John Wesley, pp. 7-8, 14). For the several influences on Wesley leading to Aldersgate see John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 174-93; Martin Schmidt, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, 213-309.

established the law more firmly by generating the power to fulfill it and by actually producing holiness in the heart.⁶⁰

However, notwithstanding his lack of clarity, Wesley tends to see much of the English religious world in terms of this second category, as not being purely natural men but certainly not as evangelical Christians either.⁶¹

By and large the "legal" man has been awakened to God-consciousness, although he tends to see God as Judge. He is now deeply concerned about his spiritual condition.⁶² He sins, but unwillingly. Having some perspective from which to evaluate his own life, he expresses remorse over his sins. He sees himself as being under the law and hence tends to live in fear, having no real peace and little, if any, sense of God's forgiving love. Such a condition, Wesley says, is typified by the Jew, for the Jew is neither atheistic, on the one hand, nor Christian, on the other. This is generally a state where the soul has been moved to see the importance of God to human existence.

⁶⁰William Ragsdale Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 240.

⁶¹This feeling tone is reflected in many sermons, examples of which are found in Works, VI, 279; Works, VII, 165, 452-62 ("True Christianity Defended").

⁶²Cf. Sermons, I, 185ff.

The nature of God. Man's natural condition is such that without even the most elementary kind of divine enablement he cannot possibly elect the good.⁶³ For Wesley, though, man's inability can be overcome or supplemented by divine grace at every necessary point in order that the goal of final justification might be reached. The details of this salvation-process are predicated on the conviction that God lovingly seeks out man. In speaking to men about God the sermon must be clear in its declaration that God is love. As we have seen, the natural man does not regard God at all (at least not in a practical sense), while the legal man sees Him as Judge. Both perspectives are limited and to some degree faulty. One responsibility of preaching is to give clear witness to the Christian God so the hearer will understand who He is and what He demands and why. This is especially important if man is or in some degree should be a reflection of God.

Generally speaking, Wesley's doctrine of God follows Protestant orthodoxy.⁶⁴ One of the clearest

⁶³Sermons, I, 158; Works, VI, 229.

⁶⁴Cannon suggests that Wesley's doctrine of God is not based on metaphysics or philosophy, but rather the "most obvious facts which come to him through the channel of religious needs." Cannon, op. cit., p. 160.

statements on his view of God is found in the sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VI."⁶⁵ In summary, Wesley emphasizes the Fatherhood of God, as respects all men by creation and particular men by redemption. God is, therefore, Creator and Sustainer, but primarily Father. As such God is a God of love. While this is true in a general sense, enabling us to pray, "Our Father," yet it is especially true in a personal sense, so we can cry, "Abba Father."⁶⁶ God has displayed this love in and through His Son, Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ Wesley exercises caution at this point since Fatherhood does not mean familiarity because God is majestic.⁶⁸ The greatness of His being is seen in His absolute power, universal real presence, and absolute knowledge. Wesley sees these essential characteristics of God revealed in His name, "Jehovah" and "I Am That I Am." While God is absolutely

⁶⁵Sermons, I, 423.

⁶⁶This comes through assurance of forgiveness and is largely based on the witness of the Spirit. Cf. Notes, on Rom. 8:16, p. 548; Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 64ff.

⁶⁷Wesley is a trinitarian but does not insist on the use of the term. Cf. Works, VI, 200-1.

⁶⁸Note Wesley's warnings against over-familiarity with God in "On Knowing Christ After the Flesh." Works, VII, 293-5.

pure and holy, His love is, as Wesley says, "above all."⁶⁹

In his sermon "On Dissipation" Wesley warns his hearers against those forces "that tend to draw us from our centre," that is, from the Creator.⁷⁰ This is the case with the natural man; he is off center spiritually and thus tends to try to find happiness in things other than God. His fundamental problem is sin although since his nature has been changed by the fall the very presence of the world is a deterrent to his restoration. As Wesley says,

The whole visible world, all we see, hear, or touch, all the objects of our senses or understanding, have a tendency to dissipate our thoughts from the invisible world; and to distract our minds from attending to Him who is both the Author and End of our being.⁷¹

The legal man, on the other hand, has become aware of his condition and quite naturally fears the deity whom he has offended.

Cannon suggests that Wesley's view of sin is

⁶⁹God is "pure, unmixed, essential goodness." Sermons, I, 529. For additional statements on the nature of God in the sermons, see Works, VI, 315f., 338ff.; Works, VII, 265ff.

⁷⁰As the "Center" of man's life, God is also the "end of every rational creature." Life then has a teleological character. Works, VII, 43.

⁷¹Works, VI, 446.

Anselmic in that sin is a violation of God's honor.⁷² Thus, although born with the "seed" of sin in him, yet he is wholly responsible for deliberate acts of transgression thereby rightfully incurring divine wrath.⁷³ Divine wrath becomes especially meaningful to man in the light of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. If man responds positively to such divine urgings for repentance and faith, then his heart is filled with peace--the essence of which is (1) a divine foretaste of "things to come," (2) a sense of certainty of being accepted, and (3) freedom from the fear of God's wrath.⁷⁴ The strength of Wesley's view of the love of God is found here. The Creator has been dishonored by the creature. Yet notwithstanding this rebellion--and subsequent fall from the image of God--God will not "quit his claim, or consent to its being given to any other."⁷⁵ God's love for His creation causes Him to actively attempt to draw man back to his true center and to genuine happiness.⁷⁶

⁷²Cannon, op. cit., p. 209. For more adequate discussions of Wesley's view of sin, see also pp. 185-200; Williams, op. cit., p. 126f.; Robert Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 121f.

⁷³Cf. Deschner, op. cit., p. 150f.

⁷⁴Sermons, I, 153.

⁷⁵Works, VI, 436.

⁷⁶Works, VI, 241, 432-34; VII, 222.

The dignity and compassion of God are further demonstrated in His willingness, even eagerness, to restore the image of God in man. It is all of His grace, His "free mercy."

All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of His mere grace, bounty, or favour; His free, undeserved favour; favour altogether undeserved; man having no claim to the least of His mercies. . . . The same free grace continues to us, at this day, life, and breath, and all things. . . . These, therefore, are so many more instances of free mercy: and whatever righteousness may be found in man, this is also the gift of God.⁷⁷

Such is the problem of sinful man that only God can do something about it.⁷⁸ Such is the nature of God that He is more than willing to do it.

History. Wesley tends to view history in terms of the salvation-process and is therefore relatively unconcerned with what might be called "secular" history. Generally speaking Wesley is less concerned with the details of this process in the sermons than in the Notes. This is understandable for two reasons. First, in the sermons Wesley is interested in preaching redemption for man and not in theorizing on the various historical aspects of the process involved. This is not to say that he is uninterested in salvation-history in the sermons,

⁷⁷Sermons, I, 37; Works, VI, 190-1.

⁷⁸Works, VII, 255.

in terms of God's self-revelation to man in the history of the race or, more precisely for Wesley, in personal experience. Actually there are several sermons that reflect the larger phases of this restoring process, the best of which are "The End of Christ's Coming," "The Scripture Way of Salvation," "Sermon on the Mount: Discourses I, II and III," "Satan's Devices," and "The Wisdom of God's Counsels."

Second, while Wesley is more willing to talk of specifics in the Notes, yet even there he often expresses a degree of uncertainty as to details, particularly in reference to problems surrounding eschatology.⁷⁹ While Wesley's thought on the historical process can be seen in reference to the "moral law" and the work of Christ, yet its clearest expression is found in reference to the progress of the church.⁸⁰ Utilizing the Notes one can find rather systematic treatments of the redemptive history of the church in Wesley's comments on Romans 9-11, Galatians 3-5, Ephesians 1, and Revelation 20-22.

The sermons reflect Wesley's conviction that God has acted redemptively in Man's history and that

⁷⁹Notes, p. 932.

⁸⁰Works, VI, 327.

specifically through Jesus Christ.⁸¹ It would not be inaccurate to suggest that Wesley's general view of history would probably be akin to a type of "supra-history," if by "supra-history [we mean] the mysterious purpose of God which, originating from beyond history, invades it and controls its course."⁸² So Wesley can say in his sermon "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge" that man's restricted knowledge of the extent of God's governing power often prohibits him from seeing God's directive purpose in worldly affairs; for example, the governments of men.⁸³ God is at work in the world correcting man's tendency to quench vital religion which is, in effect, the one thing necessary for man if he is to understand himself and his world.⁸⁴ Wesley suggests that God often acts in man's behalf without his being aware of it.⁸⁵

⁸¹Cf. "The End of Christ's Coming" which highlights Christ's relationship to man's history and hope. Works, VI, 267ff.

⁸²W. Schweitzer (ed.) Eschatology and Ethics (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1951), pp. 10-11.

⁸³Works, VI, 344.

⁸⁴Cf. Works, VI, 329f. where Wesley discusses God's means of correcting evil.

⁸⁵The purpose of God in helping man is partially realized in the ministry of "good angels" (Works, VI, 361ff.), while the power of evil is partially effected by "evil angels" (Works, VI, 370ff.).

Wesley's view of "time" in relation to "eternity" is adequate to show the teleological movement of history toward the fulfillment of the eschatological hope, for example, the kingdom of God.⁸⁶ A proper understanding of time helps one to evaluate the importance of temporal concerns. In his sermon "On Eternity" Wesley describes "time."

But is it not, in some sense, a fragment of eternity, broken off at both ends?--that portion of duration which commenced when the world began, which will continue as long as this world endures, and then expire forever?--that portion of it, which is at present measured by the revolution of the sun and planets; lying (so to speak) between two eternities, that which is past, and that which is to come. But as soon as the heavens, and the earth flee away from the face of Him that sitteth on the great white throne, time will be no more; but sink forever into the ocean of eternity.⁸⁷

Therefore, this present life (in time) is actually preparation for the world to come (eternity). In this sense worldly history (seen in terms of the salvation-process) complements God's intention in creating man.⁸⁸ The height of folly is to value this transitory life more than life in the eternal realm.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 192f.

⁸⁷Works, VI, 190.

⁸⁸"For what end is life bestowed upon the children of men? Why were we sent into the world? For one sole end, and for no other, to prepare for eternity. For this alone we live. For this, and no other purpose, is our life either given or continued." Works, VII, 229.

⁸⁹Works, VI, 195.

History and hope become meaningful to man as he experiences the grace of God in this life. At this point Williams sees in Wesley a type of "realized eschatology," particularly in reference to the Kingdom of God and sanctification.⁹⁰ According to Wesley the present faith of a "good man" (seen largely in terms of his hope for eternal life in the presence of God) is confirmed upon his "entrance into eternity."⁹¹ So the eschatological hope is gradually realized for the generality of believers in terms of three events: (1) present faith which anticipates the end, (2) death which ushers one into the "ante-chamber" of heaven, and (3) the kingdom of glory which is Wesley's ultimate, all-embracing eschatological reality. The fate of the non-believer is not so glorious since Wesley, in traditional orthodox fashion, accepts the idea of hell as an unending abode of the wicked where they are punished for their sins. Wesley's emphasis, however, is on the brighter side with the ever-present possibility of man's participation in the scheme of things, for example, God's self-revelation in redemptive history, man's awareness by faith of the goal of existence, and the as-yet

⁹⁰Williams, op. cit., pp. 194-8; cf. John C. Bomer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism (Westminster: Sacre Press, 1951), pp. 184-5.

⁹¹Works, VI, 496.

unrealized but sure future manifestation of the kingdom of glory.

Preaching to the legal man. Wesley's primary concern in preaching to the legal man is to help him make the transition from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son. Having the faith of a servant, Wesley says, "implies a divine evidence of the invisible and eternal world; yea, and an evidence of the spiritual world, so far as it can exist without living experience."⁹² At its best, however, the legal state is temporary, that is, it is something for a mid-point between the natural and evangelical man. Although not strictly a Christian, the legal man is not far from the kingdom. Nowhere is Wesley more clear on this idea than in his notes on Acts 26:28 (concerning Paul's defense before Agrippa). Commenting on Agrippa's statement, "almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Wesley's translation), Wesley says,

See here, Festus altogether a heathen, Paul altogether a Christian, Agrippa halting between both. Poor Agrippa! but almost persuaded! So near the mark, and yet fall short! another step, and thou art within the veil! Reader, stop not with Agrippa, but go on with Paul.⁹³

Wesley carries this sense of urgency from his

⁹²Works, VII, 236.

⁹³Notes, pp. 502-3.

comments on Acts 26:28 into his sermon based on that text, "The Almost Christian." In this sermon, preached July 25, 1741, at St. Mary's at Oxford, Wesley sets forth two characteristics of the "almost Christian"; (1) "heathen honesty" (having a kind of truth and love) and (2) having the "form of religion."⁹⁴ Such a picture is often indicative of the natural man; though at this point the legal man has been convicted of the futility of relaxing on his good works and moral conduct. The main danger faced by both the almost Christian (the legal man) is that he might stop short of evangelical repentance.⁹⁵ In his sermon on "Self-Denial" Wesley urges the legal man to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," "deny [himself]," and "take up [his] cross."⁹⁶ Essentially this means that the legal man must humble himself and accept divine mercy, a step which must be taken deliberately.

What the legal man needs most is encouragement to "press on" to actual saving faith. For Wesley, good moral behavior is insufficient to meet the demands of the gospel.

⁹⁴Cf. Sermons, I, 54ff.

⁹⁵Legal repentance, in essence, is a conviction of sin while evangelical repentance is an actual change of life. Cf. Notes, on Mt. 3:8, p. 23; Sermons, I, 155-6.

⁹⁶Works, V, 110-11.

Even conviction in itself is inadequate to assure one of pardon. However, combine these aspects of religious experience with faith and the evangelical life begins in earnest. Preaching to the church of his day, Wesley warns,

Beware then, thou who art called by the name of Christ, that thou come not short of the mark of thy high calling. Beware thou rest not, either in a natural state, with too many that are accounted good Christians; or in a legal state, wherein those who are highly esteemed of men are generally content to live and die. Nay, but God hath prepared better things for thee, if thou follow on till thou attain. Thou art not called to fear and tremble, like devils; but to rejoice and love, like the angels of God.⁹⁷

In proclaiming the grace of God to the legal man the preacher must urge him--by all possible means--to let his fear be transformed into faith by trusting absolutely in the saving love of God.⁹⁸

THE EVANGELICAL MAN

Part of the goal of the early Methodist movement, that of "spreading scriptural holiness," was met as lives were changed, as natural men became evangelical men--or, as Wesley too generously puts it at times, as men were

⁹⁷Sermons, I, 197; cf. Works, VI, 264f; where Wesley attempts to strip away the pretenses of the church by showing that it often lapses into the natural state (also Sermons, I, 179-80).

⁹⁸Works, VII, 236.

transformed from "all sin" to "all holiness." This is the purpose of preaching for Wesley, to bring souls to birth and nourish them to maturity. This spirit has been vividly recorded by Wesley in a letter to a man who had objected to the content of Methodist preaching, seeing in it "no life, no food." After an apologetic defending the Methodist way of preaching law and grace, Wesley adds,

From the beginning they (a thriving society in Yorkshire) had been taught both the law and the gospel. 'God loves you: therefore love and obey Him. Christ died for you: therefore die to sin. Christ is risen: therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore: therefore live to God, till you live with Him in glory.'

So we preached; and so you believed. This is the scriptural way, the Methodist way, the true way. God grant we may never turn therefrom, to the right hand or to the left.⁹⁹

The result hoped for by such preaching is the evangelical man.¹⁰⁰ This man is the true Christian, the one who now sees God as Father and, as a result, loves Him. He has the faith of a son being justified by faith. He lives by divine grace and enjoys true peace, liberty, and joy. As a child of the kingdom he not only serves God willingly, but also is full of hope concerning eternal life. Being motivated by the spirit of love he fights and conquers sin. It was Wesley's hope, of course, that all

⁹⁹Letters, III, 85.

¹⁰⁰Cf. Sermons, I, 191f.

Methodists would reflect this image. In 1739 he wrote a tract entitled "The Character of a Methodist" in which he spelled out in some detail the essentials of evangelical faith.¹⁰¹ His disappointments were keen when his followers often failed to live up to the standards which he believed were "the common fundamental principles of Christianity." Wesley's optimism for redeemed man is clearly seen in a study of the principles of evangelical faith, for here we find the total triumph of the grace of God over the sins and estrangement of man. Man is now truly man!

Re-creation. Wesley's view of the "new birth" complements his concept of creation. As we have seen above the creation of man was an act of God's goodness (or mercy). Man in the garden had every material and spiritual convenience, that is, everything necessary to his continued happiness had been provided by a benevolent Creator. In the sense of goodness Adam lacked nothing. But the temptation and subsequent fall of the first pair so shattered the beauty of God's world and man's soul that Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden and all

¹⁰¹Works, VIII, 340-47; cf. the tracts, "advice to the People Called Methodists" (Works, VIII, 351-59) and "The Principles of a Methodist" (Works, VIII, 359-74).

nature turned against them.¹⁰² It was with the fall, however, that the practical aspect of God's plan for man's restoration began to take effect.¹⁰³ The most significant phase of this plan was seen in the self-revelation of God in Jesus. Now by faith in Jesus man can be restored, be re-created.

Commenting on II Corinthians 5:17, "therefore if any one be in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new," Wesley observes,

He (the 'true believer') had new life, new senses, new faculties, new affections, new appetites, new ideas, and new conceptions. His whole tenor of action and conversation is new, and he lives, as it were, in a new world. God, men, the whole creation, heaven, earth, and all things therein, appear in a new light, and stand related to him in a new manner, since he was created anew in Christ Jesus.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Not only is man's body a hinderance to the restoring-process, but nature also is the "enemy of man." Cf. Works, VI, 245f.

¹⁰³Theologically, Deschner suggests that Wesley's view of providence incorporates both supra and infra-lapsarian motifs. Deschner, op. cit., pp. 22-3, 77, 96, 139, 149, 191.

¹⁰⁴Notes, p. 657. Wesley has a sermon on this text, "On Sin in Believers," but in it he takes a different direction than that indicated in the Notes. That is, in the sermon Wesley states that despite the genuine Christian being a new creation--an undeniable and glorious fact--he still has the remains of sin in his heart. He is new, yes, but not "wholly" so. Sin remains but does not reign! Cf. Works, V, 151f. Closer study reveals

This drama of new life is analogous to the natural birth of a child. Like an unborn child, the natural man has all of the faculties necessary to real life, yet he must be "born" for these faculties to become useful. This new birth is "the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus'. . . ." ¹⁰⁵

For Wesley, this new life is created in the soul by another. The power for such radical transformation comes from God who alone knows the heart of man. ¹⁰⁶ Although not done without his consent, new life is given to man with no consideration to any supposed personal merit or worth. At this point Wesley is guarding both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Wesley's eventual break with the Moravians was primarily concerned with their doctrine of "stillness," that is, the idea that men are not to use the "means of grace" while waiting for

that Wesley is closer to the spirit of the writer of II Corinthians in the Notes than in the sermon. Cf. W. Robertson Nicoll (ed.), The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), III, 71-2; R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1946), pp. 1038-41; et. al.

¹⁰⁵Sermons, II, 234.

¹⁰⁶Works, VII, 255; 342; Sermons, II, 222; cf. Notes, on II Corinthians 4:6, p. 653.

saving grace.¹⁰⁷ Rather, Wesley calls men to a decision. Man is responsible to choose the right way of life and to use all the means of grace at his command to secure and enhance it.¹⁰⁸ Yet, at the same time, Wesley stresses the absolute inability of man to actually reform himself. "Preventing grace" enables man only to choose, not to actualize salvation. There is, therefore, no possible way for man to lay claim to any kind of works-righteousness. For Wesley, there is no such thing as a work of supere-rogation.¹⁰⁹ A great deal of his preaching is concerned with tearing away at man's high estimation of himself, as though he deserved God's saving love.

An interesting study in Wesley's view of the sinfulness of human nature--which is partially reflected in the sermons--is his view of the religious education of children, particularly as it concerns Kingswood School. Having no children of his own, Wesley was little enough concerned with the interests and habits of children. He tended to treat them as adults in matters of religion.

¹⁰⁷Cf. Journal, Nov. 1, 1739-Sept. 3, 1741.

¹⁰⁸Works, VI, 280; all of Wesley's appeals are made on the basis of man's ability to choose.

¹⁰⁹Works, VI, 148. It is the Lord who is our righteousness. This, says Wesley, is the "foundation of Christianity." Works, V, 235, 242.

One result of this was that Wesley did not allow any pastime activity that did not reflect his understanding of serious Christianity. Therefore, play periods, for example, were out.¹¹⁰ Body is correct in saying,

It is, perhaps, the inherent defect in the system that Wesley never considered the child as a child, but rather as a unit for salvation, bred in sin, apt to evil, and altogether as a 'brand to be plucked out of the burning.'¹¹¹

According to Wesley's sermon "On the Education of Children" a child's nature has the tendency toward atheism, pride, love of the world, anger, deviation from truth, and speaking or acting contrary to justice.¹¹² Thus, Wesley's main objective in working with children "was to cultivate in them a sense of their sinful nature and a desire for a cure, by talks on their natural state, and . . . repentance and faith."¹¹³ Obedience becomes possible for the child as his will is broken by his parents.¹¹⁴ The

¹¹⁰For a schedule of events at Kingswood School see the "Short Account of Kingswood School," Works, XIII, 285f.; Alfred H. Body, John Wesley and Education (London: Epworth Press, 1936), p. 159.

¹¹¹Body, op. cit., p. 94.

¹¹²Works, VII, 86-98.

¹¹³John W. Prince, Wesley on Religious Education (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1926), p. 97.

¹¹⁴Wesley's mother first gave him this piece of advice (cf. Prince, op. cit., p. 111) which shows up in the sermons. Cf. Works, VII, 104ff.; 80ff. Obedience to pastors also carries some of these overtones. Works, VII, 110f.

significance of this is to point up the necessity of man's nature being changed by another; the ultimate of which is God's grace overcoming man's real inadequacy due to sin. This view of human nature automatically cancels out any attempt at self-justification.

It is by faith that the image of God is restored to man. What Adam perceived naturally in the garden Christians now perceive by faith. That is, the element of faith--as divine gift--bridges the gap caused by man's loss of understanding in the fall.¹¹⁵ In speaking of the restoration of the image of God to man, Wesley means that man's understanding is enabled to generally comprehend God's working with man. This is a partial restoration of that part of the natural image lost in the "fall."¹¹⁶ In addition, the moral image of God is restored in man by a real change in his nature. The actualizing of the total moral image in man normally involves a process whereby

¹¹⁵Wesley says faith supplies the "defect" of sense, that is, it allows us to understand and enjoy spiritual realities. Cf. Works, VII, 232; faith is the "condition" of justification, Works, V, 61-2. The new birth gives us "new senses," spiritual senses. Works, VII, 256.

¹¹⁶Cf. Works, VII, 230; Sermons, II, 225; which includes the restoration of the Holy Spirit within man. Works, VII, 512. This restoration of the Spirit to man's reason is important for Wesley's concept of the "witness of the Spirit" or assurance. Cf. Works, V, 111ff.

love becomes the sole motivating force behind all of man's relationships. The possible extent of present restoration for Wesley does not include complete renewal of the body as that must wait for the day of resurrection and the re-making of the created order. Notwithstanding this, man's experience of the restoring grace of God is complete in a spiritual sense in this life. Man becomes a whole man by grace. The sickness or disease of sin has been healed.¹¹⁷ In one sense of the term, faith restores man to his true humanity--to his genuinely natural self. Now the man of faith is filled with hope in the eschaton when the total redemptive process will be completed, thus complementing entirely God's provision for sinful man in His promise at the "fall."¹¹⁸

Community. Although the word "community" is not a Wesleyan term, it does suggest Wesley's very real concern

¹¹⁷Sermons, II, 223-4; Works, VI, 108f., 223; Christ has been restoring man since the time of Abel, Works, VI, 253.

¹¹⁸"What is Man?", especially the conclusion. Works, VII, 230. The new birth relieves man of the guilt and power of sin. Sermons, I, 192-3, cf. Notes, on I John 1:7-10, pp. 904-5. The event of resurrection will be the time of full restoration (Works, VI, 515) when the weakness of the body will be overcome (Works, VI, 477f.) The present weakness of the body is not to be lamented, however, since faith in the face of such weakness (1) demonstrates the power of God, and (2) keeps redeemed man humble (Works, VII, 346-8).

that faith find an arena within which to express itself. For Wesley, authentic faith cannot normally be lived out in isolation.

By Christianity, I mean that method of worshiping God which is here revealed to man by Jesus Christ. When I say, this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist as well, but that it cannot subsist at all, without society--without living and conversing with other men.¹¹⁹

Wesley's use of the word "society" here must be understood in its broadest sense since the man of faith must face many varying--and often conflicting--elements of society, for example, the church, the Methodist Society, the family, and the "neighbor" (the "world"). For purposes of this discussion the word "community" will be substituted for "society" in order to allow some immediate distinction between the various kinds and degrees of community fellowship and the Methodist society, which is actually only one aspect of the total concept of community.

In essence it can be said that Wesley believes that the renewed man lives in two worlds, the spiritual and the physical. Consequently he needs the fellowship of other believers as encouragement and sources of information (as in teaching, preaching, et cetera) and sharp confrontation with the world so that his convictions may be better

¹¹⁹Sermons, I, 382.

defined and his faith be increased. Of the four varieties of community which concern Wesley in the sermons (church, "society," family and world) he places most emphasis on the positive aspects of the fellowship of the church. This is natural since Wesley is what McConnell calls a "High Churchman."¹²⁰ Wesley's appreciation for the Established Church never diminished throughout his career notwithstanding the often strained relationships between them, which were usually caused by the activities of the Methodist Societies.¹²¹ Deschner has suggested the important place the church "plays in Wesley's view of the salvation-process by placing it after a discussion of the sanctifying of the individual and including both these perspectives under the general heading of "The Kingdom of Grace."¹²² There is a sense in which the corporate body of believers participates in the redemption of man. The destiny of the community of faith becomes the destiny of the faithful man.

¹²⁰Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 240.

¹²¹For some sermonic apologetic regarding Wesley's view of the essential unity of the "society" and the Established Church, see "On Attending the Church Service" (Works, VII, 175f.), "The Ministerial Office" (Works, VII, 237ff.), and "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel near the City-Road, London" (Works, VII, 423f.).

¹²²Deschner, op. cit., pp. 131-2.

At the same time Wesley's special use of the "society" as a place where serious Christianity can be explained and enforced is important to the total salvation-process. The role of the society, in Wesley's eyes, complements the activity of the church and for that reason he insists on a sustained working relationship between the two. However, it is important to note here that Michalson tends to credit Wesley with more attachment to the Established Church than appears to have been the case.

The 'first principle of a Methodist' was 'wholly and solely' the foolishness of preaching. On the one side, Wesley regarded the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as 'more powerful' than preaching. For that reason, if forced to choose, he would have preferred the service of the Church of England with its sacramental life to the service of a Methodist society with its kerygmatic edification.¹²³

The impact of Michalson's statement is lessened somewhat by a careful study of his sources. In 1789 Wesley did preach an apologetic on the purpose of the Methodist Societies ("The Ministerial Office") in which he said that the "first principle of Methodism . . . was wholly and solely to preach the gospel."¹²⁴ He likewise did make an observation on one occasion, but not as a principle of his experience or theology, that he "found

¹²³Carl Michalson, Worldly Theology (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1967), p. 127.

¹²⁴Works, VII, 277; emphasis mine.

much of the power of God in preaching, but far more at the Lord's Table."¹²⁵ Michalson combines these two statements of Wesley with a journal entry dated January 2, 1787,¹²⁶ to conclude that "if forced to choose" Wesley would have preferred the Church of England and the Sacraments to the Methodist Society and preaching. However, on that occasion (January 2, 1787) Wesley was imploring the leaders of the Deptford Society not to talk of separating from the Established Church. Nothing whatsoever is mentioned of either sacraments or preaching. That was simply not the question. Wesley did not understand his concept of either field-preaching or preaching-houses as being in opposition to the general ministry of the Church of England. It is also clear that Wesley was not inclined to consider closing the societies even if the Church had given him an ultimatum to do so.¹²⁷ To speculate what Wesley would have actually done if forced into such a choice is rather academic at this point. Wesley was not faced with that question as an ultimatum and it is highly

¹²⁵Works, III, 156, on Sunday, November 13; emphasis mine.

¹²⁶Works, IV, 357.

¹²⁷Cf. Simon, John Wesley The Master Builder, p. 39ff. Also Letters, III, 131-2; for Wesley's general remarks on reasons for leaving either the Church or a society, see Works, VI, 408f.

doubtful that it could be raised as a viable issue in light of his understanding of the Church and its relation to his societies, especially at the late date cited by Michalson.

Preaching to the evangelical man. The "saving of souls" for Wesley did not stop with a particular religious experience. His view of the Christian life as movement toward final justification and his disdain for Calvinistic predestination points up the theological foundation upon which he based his appeals to the evangelical man. In addition, the printed sermons in large part reflect Wesley's interest in the dynamics of living the committed life. He did not relax the intensity of his call to righteousness once his hearers had experienced the saving grace of God. The printed sermons are filled with instructions on how to live the Christian life in light of the goals Wesley saw in the salvation-process.¹²⁸

In the sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse V" Wesley sums up his practical advice to the

¹²⁸Doughty classifies the subjects of the printed sermons in three groups: (1) those that deal with "fundamental doctrines," (2) those "bearing upon speculative theology," and (3) those concerned with morality, etc. Cf. W. L. Doughty, John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 84-106. Wesley's larger concern for repentance, faith, and obedience, however, is found in practically every sermon, regardless of its particular theological or practical thrust.

Christian in three points: (1) stop doing evil, (2) attend the ordinances, and (3) do good to others.¹²⁹ As mentioned above, these admonitions by Wesley can only be accomplished by God's power, not mere legislation. "Let thy religion be the religion of the heart."¹³⁰ Wesley has this same basic summary in the conclusion to his sermon "On Public Diversion," only the general wording is changed, as well as the order of points two and three: (1) oppose wickedness in every way, (2) show mercy to the afflicted neighbor, and (3) constantly attend "God's public service" and the "blessed sacrament."¹³¹ It is possible to view Wesley's general appeals to the evangelical man under these three headings if they are seen in a broad perspective, for example, as (1) the call to righteousness, (2) the use of the ordinances, (3) to love and serve the other.

Wesley consistently puts priority on the call to personal righteousness. The typical seriousness with which Wesley approaches the Christian's view of the faith is found in his conclusion to the sermon, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I."

¹²⁹Sermons, I, 420-21.

¹³⁰Sermons, I, 422.

¹³¹Works, VII, 507-8.

Ye whose eyes are enlightened, be not troubled by those who walk on still in darkness. Ye do not walk on in a vain shadow: God and eternity are real things. Heaven and hell are in very deed open before you; and ye are on the edge of the great gulf. It has already swallowed up more than words can express, nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues; and still yawns to devour, whether they see it or no, the giddy, miserable children of men. O cry aloud! Spare not! Lift up your voice to Him who grasps both time and eternity, both for yourselves and for your brethren, that ye may be counted worthy to escape the destruction that cometh as a whirlwind! that we may be brought safe through all the wanes and storms, into the haven where you would be! Weep for yourselves, till He wipes away the tears from your eyes. And even then, weep for the miseries that come upon the earth, till the Lord of all shall put a period to misery and sin, shall wipe away the tears from all faces, and 'the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.'¹³²

The bulk of Wesley's printed sermons are largely directed toward the Christian reader. He encourages the believer to flee sin,¹³³ beware of bigotry,¹³⁴ and live a disciplined life.¹³⁵ Wesley is not patient with a too-relaxed concept of faith¹³⁶ and calls his hearer to obey

¹³²Sermons, I, 333-34; similar conclusions urging the Christian to continue in faith are found in "The First-Fruits of the Spirit" (Sermons I, 176-77), "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption" (Sermons, I, 197-98), "The Law Established Through Faith," I and II (Works, V, 457, 466), "Self-Denial" (Works, VI, 113-14; cf. pp. 148-49), "On a Single Eye" (Works, VII, 304-5; cf. 201-2, 264).

¹³³Sermons, I, 312.

¹³⁴Sermons, II, 123-25.

¹³⁵Sermons, I, 197-98.

¹³⁶Sermons, 354-55.

his "tender conscience,"¹³⁷ to willingly bear suffering,¹³⁸ and generally be a good example of an authentic Christian.¹³⁹ Perhaps the major means of improving Christian character is to "press on" toward a life of holiness (pure love).¹⁴⁰

'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved,' both in the law and the prophets, and having the prophetic word confirmed unto us in the gospel, by our blessed Lord and His Apostles; 'let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' 'Let us fear, lest 'so many' promises being made us of entering into His rest,' which he that hath entered into has ceased from all his own works, 'any of us should come short of it.' 'This one thing let us do, forgetting those things which are behind, let us press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,' crying unto Him day and night, till we also are 'delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God!'¹⁴¹

Wesley's second basic appeal is for Christians to observe the ordinances. In the General Rules of the

¹³⁷Works, VII, 192-4.

¹³⁸Sermons, I, 512-13.

¹³⁹In life (Sermons, I, 397); in speech (Sermons, II, 296-308); in dress (Works, VII, 15ff.); with money (Works, VII, 1ff.; et. al.). Wesley preaches more sermons on the handling of money than any other topic on ethics.

¹⁴⁰Cf. Works, VII, 237; especially "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (Sermons, II, 459-60) where Wesley spells out with unusual clarity the steps which lead one to an experience of personal holiness.

¹⁴¹Sermons, II, 174.

United Societies Wesley lists the "ordinances of God" as "the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence";¹⁴² the chief of which are prayer, searching the Scriptures, and receiving the communion.¹⁴³ Wesley has at least one sermon on each of the ordinances, generally speaking, except on searching the Scriptures.¹⁴⁴ There is no magic in the ordinances, for Wesley, but when used in faith they are a means of increasing grace.¹⁴⁵ They are, however, only a means of grace, never an end in themselves. Therefore, Christians are to use them regularly, thereby not neglecting the benefits to which they lead.

Wesley's third basic appeal to the evangelical man

¹⁴²Works, VIII, 271.

¹⁴³Sermons, I, 242.

¹⁴⁴On worship, including preaching, see "On Attending the Church Service (Works, VII, 174ff.) and "Of the Church" (Works, VI, 392ff.); or on the Lord's Supper, "The Duty of Constant Communion" (Works, VII, 147ff.); on prayer, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VI" (Sermons, I, 423ff.); "On Family Religion" (Works, VII, 76ff.); on fasting or abstinence, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VII" (Sermons, I, 448ff.); "Self-Denial" (Works, VI, 103ff.). For Wesley's view of the relation of searching the Scriptures to the increase of grace, see "The Means of Grace" (Sermons, I, 248f.).

¹⁴⁵Sermons, I, 394-5.

is based on the social character of Christian love, for example, to love and serve the other--to social concern. Wesley is quick to state that while social virtues (meekness and peace-making, for example) imply some relation with the world yet that relation is only that which is necessary to good works.¹⁴⁶ The believer is expected to involve himself directly in works of mercy and/or support of groups for social betterment. After an address on the history and purpose of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, Wesley concludes with a rather long and stirring appeal for commitment to the cause of the Society.

O say not, 'This (the work of the Society) is too heavy a cross; I have not strength or courage to hear it!' True, not of yourself: but you that believe 'can do all things through Christ strengthening you' . . . if thou wast not called before, I call thee now, in the name of Christ: take up thy cross, and follow Him! Reason no more with flesh and blood, but now resolve to cast in thy lot with the most despised, the most infamous, of His followers; the filth and off scouring of the world!¹⁴⁷

Capsuling the main thoughts of his series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, Wesley says,

¹⁴⁶Cf. Sermons, I, 383f.; Also Works, VI, 452ff.; on amusements or "diversions," see Works, VII, 504-06.

¹⁴⁷Sermons, II, 503-4; see also "The Reward of the Righteous" (Works, VII, 127ff.) which was preached for the benefit of The Humane Society.

In a word: let thy religion be the religion of the heart. . . . Let thy soul be filled with mildness, gentleness, patience, longsuffering towards all men; at the same time that all which is in thee is athirst for God, the living God, longing to awake up after His likeness and be satisfied with it! Be thou a lover of God and of all mankind! In this spirit do and suffer all things.¹⁴⁸

This appeal is representative of Wesley's general call to social righteousness. Only on rare occasions will he outline something specific for his hearers to do. It seems as though he is concerned with establishing a basic attitude in the believer which will give him a perspective from which to view the whole of life's responsibilities. Thus, while he constantly appeals to the Christian to be involved redemptively in his society, it is usually made in the broadest terms.

This is not to say that Wesley is not interested in specifics as far as social involvement goes. The sermons give us many examples of his concern for specific social problems. The most obvious example would be his preaching on subjects related to the poor. The magnitude of that particular problem in England's history is partially seen in Wesley's sermon "On Visiting the Sick." In this sermon he calls for participation in solving the problem of poverty and indicates some ways help can be given.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸Sermons, II. 36.

¹⁴⁹Works, VII, 117f; cf. Works, VII, 20f.

Again, one can see specific advice given in relation to Wesley's view of war. In "National Sins and Miseries" (published in 1775) he concludes in part by saying,

Show mercy more especially to the poor widows, to the helpless orphans, of your countrymen who are now numbered among the dead, who fell among the slain in a distant land. Who knoweth but the Lord will yet be entreated, will calm the madness of the people, will quench the flames of contention, and breathe into all the spirit of love, unity, and concord?¹⁵⁰

Yet these concerns and others like them are personal issues, in Wesley's preaching, and aim at the heart rather than a particular plan for relief, either local or national. On the other hand, the evangelical man can hardly refuse to respond to the needs of humanity in light of Wesley's basic approach to social involvement. If he does so he risks losing the favor of God.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Wesley views man largely from the standpoint of his spiritual sensitivity, or lack of it. Although he tends to classify man in two basic groups--the natural (non-Christian) man and the evangelical (Christian) man, yet he does allow a special category for the "heathen" and what he calls the "legal" man. For the most part, Wesley's emphasis in the sermons revolves around

¹⁵⁰Works, VII, 408.

descriptions of the nature and responsibilities of the natural and evangelical man. The category of legal man is, for Wesley, that man who has been awakened, but who has not yet experienced the saving grace of God. It is helpful to be reminded that these general groups often overlap each other, Wesley says, and therefore in one sense they are arbitrary groupings, although in the main correct.

In preaching Wesley attempts to awaken a God-consciousness in the natural man by picturing him as a lost sinner who will eventually end up in hell, unless he repents and believes the gospel. To this man Wesley often talks of the "fall" and its significance for him. He also points out his responsibility to choose (by the aid of "preventing grace") what he knows to be the right or the good. All of this involves an awareness by the natural man of who he is as well as on what his value structure rests (pride). In attempting to reach this man Wesley often appeals to the emotion of fear by referring to the consequences of sin, here and hereafter. The general feeling tone of the sermons, however, revolves around the love of God to sinful man.

The legal man--on the other hand--needs encouragement more than conviction. He needs to see God as Father rather than Judge; as someone to whom he can go and find

personal forgiveness. God's nature is holy love, for Wesley, and He has designed a plan or scheme of salvation within which all men can find meaning to existence and hope in the world to come. The legal man must be cautious though, for the Spirit can be quenched and he can lapse once again into a life of selfish pride. For this man Wesley has one basic message, "press on" to an experience of saving grace!

Finally, Wesley talks in terms of the new man in Christ, the evangelical man. This man has experienced the "new birth" which complements God's original creative activity. With this new spiritual sensitivity man's obedience has fulfilled God's loving act in Christ and he now lives the life of love. This love is nurtured in "community," that is, authentic faith is increased and expressed in concert with others. Man no longer lives for himself, but for the other. Basically, Wesley appeals to this man to move toward holiness of heart and life. He likewise urges him to find a social framework within which faith can operate in behalf of others.

CHAPTER III

THE DESTINY OF REDEEMED MAN

As was indicated in the previous chapter, Wesley's primary interest in the sermons revolves around the possibilities of grace for man and, as a result, is for the most part concerned with the destiny of the one being redeemed. By destiny here is meant the present and future cooperative experience of man with God in relation to the salvation-process, that is, the fulfilling by faith of God's redemptive plan for man. This is not to say that the man who rejects God's gracious offer of forgiveness and restoration has no destiny. It is only too apparent to Wesley what that destiny entails here and hereafter.¹ However, Wesley is concerned with these painfully negative themes only as they relate in some way to his positive

¹Wesley's eschatology has received only slight treatment as yet by scholars. However, some indication of his overall view can be gained from Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 198f.; A Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), pp. 270-79; W. L. Doughty, John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 106; cf. in the sermons, "The Great Assize" (Works, V, 171ff.), "Of Hell" (Works, VI, 381ff.); also Notes, on Matthew 25:30-46 (pp. 120-22), Revelation 20:11-14 (pp. 1040-41). Cf. this writer's study, Jerry Lee Mercer, "The Destiny of the Church in Wesley's Eschatology" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, 1965).

affirmation of God's grace in man's life. He seems basically concerned with leading his hearers, not driving them.

It is relatively easy to get an overview of the destiny of redeemed man in Wesley's thought by reading selected sermons. Without doubt, the single best sermon on this general theme is "The Scripture Way of Salvation." In this sermon Wesley attempts to lay out the nature of Christian faith in relation to present salvation by discussing repentance, faith, justification, sanctification, and good works. A second sermon which likewise deals with the salvation-process, but from a different theological base (that of the kingdom of God), is "Satan's Devices." In this sermon Wesley is concerned with present (the "first-fruits of the Spirit") and future (the "harvest") salvation and how Christian faith can increase in the face of opposition. By adding to these sermons "The Marks of the New Birth," "The Great Privilege of Those That are Born of God," "The New Birth," "Christian Perfection," and "On Visiting the Sick" one can get a remarkably full outline of Wesley's basic view of the beginning, progress, and hope of the redeemed life, including its fundamental ethical thrust.

Another way of approaching the subject of the destiny of redeemed man is to study Wesley's series of

thirteen sermons on Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount.² Jesus' intent in this address, Wesley says, was to give the "whole plan of His religion; to give us a full prospect of Christianity; to describe at large the nature of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."³ Wesley divides the address in the following fashion: chapter five contains the sum of true religion, principally in eight parts; chapter six lays out five rules for a right intention; chapter seven contains cautions against various hinderances of religion with a brief application of the whole sermon.⁴ The primary concern of this series, as with the resultant structure emerging from the sermons listed above, revolves around the idea of the primacy of love in Christian experience. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is to study Wesley's view of the destiny of redeemed man in terms of the concept of love as related to (1) love in the Christian life, (2) love and the image of God, (3) love and social responsibility, and (4) love and the kingdom of God.

²For some introductory material on the series, see Sermons, I, 313-4; cf. John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 94-5.

³Sermons, I, 319.

⁴Sermons, I, 320-1; cf. Notes, p. 28f.

LOVE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In the sermon "The Way to the Kingdom" Wesley says that "true religion" consists of three "particulars"; righteousness, peace, and joy.⁵ By righteousness Wesley means primarily man's obedient love to God for the forgiveness which he has experienced.⁶ Love, therefore, is one of the first responses to and evidences of God's redemptive work in man's life. "The love which our Lord requires in all his followers," says Wesley, "is the love of God and man;--of God, for his own, and man, for God's sake."⁷ As such, love is one of the marks of the new birth.⁸ Love, with faith and hope, become the "sum of perfection on earth."⁹ The beginning of love in the Christian life is the beginning of true holiness.

This experience of love is what Wesley calls the

⁵Sermons, I, 151.

⁶In this sermon Wesley equates "love" with "righteousness" and "holiness." These terms, in turn, describe "the Kingdom of God" or "the Kingdom of Heaven" which is the "immediate fruit of God's reigning in the soul." Cf. Sermons, I, 152-3. Note Sugden's objection to the way in which Wesley uses the term love in relation to righteousness. Sermons, I, 151, footnote 7.

⁷Works, VII, 495.

⁸Sermons, I, 292.

⁹Notes, on I Corinthians 13:13, p. 628.

"life of God in the soul of a believer."

It immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit; God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and a reaction of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifesting to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus.¹⁰

It is obvious from this statement of Wesley's on the nature of the Christian life that this love of God is the communication of God's own basic nature: to man holy love. Its continuance in the soul of man is likewise dependent on this constant action--reaction process.¹¹

Such relationship (based on love), for Wesley, is better described than defined. It is in direct contrast to the life of natural man whose love is turned inward to himself and as a result lives by the impulses of pride. The new birth brings about a "vast inward change" in man whereby the love of God sets aside the quest of the sinful nature to dominate the whole of man. The sinful nature, however, is not to be thought of as an alien force or power resident in the heart or soul of man. It is rather

¹⁰ Sermons, I, 311.

¹¹ Sermons, I, 312.

the tendency of man's unregenerate nature. Therefore, it is not so much that sin has to be removed as that the nature of man has to be changed. Summing up a brief discussion on this very point, Chiles states, "sin (in Wesley's thought) is not so much ontological degradation or demolition of human reality as it is illness and contagion; not so much biological and sub-personal distortion as it is an inversion of relationships involving motive and intention."¹²

The process whereby the image of God is restored in man is then, by and large, progressive in nature. It is apparently not completed in a moment but in stages, as in the healing of a physical disease. Always with Wesley there is the process; conviction, submission, restoration, and growth. This process or movement indicates Wesley's concern for Christian life as a dynamic force. It is never static. For example, love itself is a dynamic positive force, always enlarging itself, actively seeking ways of expressing itself. Preaching in 1777, Wesley

¹²Robert E. Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935 (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 122; cf. W. E. Sangster, The Path to Perfection (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), p. 113ff.; George Allen Turner, The Vision Which Transforms (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), p. 290f.; For an opposing view see Leo George Cox, John Wesley's Concept of Perfection (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), p. 117f.

interprets the Methodist understanding of love as follows:

This love is the great medicine of life; the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world; for all the miseries and vices of men. . . . This religion of love, and joy, and peace, has its seal in the inmost soul; but is ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing up, not only in all innocence . . . but, likewise, in every kind of benefice,--spreading virtue and happiness to all around it.¹³

The main thrust of Wesley's sermon "On Zeal" also indicates that the experience of God's love seeks to expand its personal intensity and social expression. Christian zeal, Wesley says, is "fervent love."¹⁴ It is a natural reaction of the redeemed soul in gratitude to God for His saving grace. While zealous for every aspect of authentic Christian faith (the church, works of mercy, et cetera), the Christian is to be most zealous for love itself, which is "the queen of all graces, the highest perfection in earth and heaven, the very image of the invisible God."¹⁵ The very obvious emphasis here is the necessity of the movement of personal grace, in the sense of enlargement. The whole of Christian commitment involves progressiveness in love toward God. As Wesley puts it in his sermon "The Cure of Evil-Speaking," "if love is

¹³Works, VII, 424.

¹⁴Works, VII, 59.

¹⁵Works, VII, 67.

not conquered, it conquers all things. Who can tell the force of love?"¹⁶

This query by Wesley, "who can tell the force of love?", reflects his primary thesis concerning Christian experience, which says that the force of love is such that it can completely captivate the whole man to the actual exclusion of deliberate sinfulness. Once an individual has become a believer, the dynamic of love (as action and reaction) moves him toward final justification. The man being so redeemed must be careful to allow this divine gift to flow into and through his life with the least possible resistance. While the body itself is no help to continue holiness, as we have seen, yet neither is it a necessary threat to love's fulness. What can hinder, and even stop, the free flow of God's love is ultimately the believer's deliberate choice to break the relationship between himself and God. As an example of this, Wesley sees riches as the single greatest threat to Methodism's understanding and experience of God's love. In his sermon "The Danger of Riches" Wesley levels a special warning at Methodists not to shift their values from God to material possessions.¹⁷ This transfer of affection hinders the

¹⁶Sermons, II, 300.

¹⁷Works, VII, 10-11.

strength of God's love in that there is no reaction or response by man to God.¹⁸

It must be pointed out that the design of evil in attempting to quench the power of love in the Christian's life normally takes channels that are difficult to perceive. For example, in the sermon "Catholic Spirit" love is hindered by emphasizing the differences among Christians rather than their similarities.¹⁹ In his sermon "Satan's Devices" Wesley says the evil one usually tempts Christians at one of three points; by attempting to get believers to (1) depend on works-righteousness, (2) despair of obtaining God's grace, or (3) give up under a sense of great personal sinfulness.²⁰ However, even though Christians do not live in deliberate sin,²¹ they may live below their potential for experiencing new dimensions of God's love. These will not fail to reach the goal of eternal life, although there will be less reward for them in the kingdom of glory.²²

¹⁸The practical neglect of this response will be the loss of the Holy Spirit in the soul of man, thereby negating the power by which one obeys. Cf. Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 116-23.

¹⁹Sermons, II, 130. For Wesley love is the only proper response to those who differ with us. Sermons, II, 124-5.

²⁰Sermons, II, 193ff.

²¹Cf. Sermons II, 169.

²²Works, VII, 28-9.

Temptation and sin can be consistently overcome in the believer's life by the power of love, thereby not allowing any kind of ultimate hinderance to righteousness to arise from within. When God's love changes the nature of man one result is the establishment of a tension between love and sin in the believer's experience. While sin remains in the believer's heart after conversion, it does not reign, according to Wesley. It cannot reign because love has become the dominant power in the Christian's heart and its increase gradually heals the disease of sin. There is a possibility, however, that the Christian may forfeit the love of God by unbelief and/or a lack of obedience. In this case sin has become the greater force and overpowered love. The sermons "The Wilderness State" is a good example of what is meant here by "tension" in relation to love and sin.²³ Just as God's love gradually overcomes the presence of sin in a person's life, in like manner this love may itself be gradually overcome by evil if the Christian fails to understand that the life of love must be continually cultivated.

Nothing can be more plain, than that the life of God in the soul does not continue, much less increase, unless we use all opportunities of communion with God, and pouring out our hearts before him. If, therefore, we are negligent of this . . . that life will surely decay, And if we long or

²³Works, VI, 78ff.

frequently intermit them, it will gradually die away.²⁴

The privileges of love are such for Wesley that they enable the believer to experience a degree of righteousness greater than Adam knew in the garden. In fact, the fall of Adam actually worked out for the good of the race in that God is now capable of being known in a way that was impossible before man's original disobedience.²⁵

If Adam had not sinned, the Son of God had not died: Consequently that amazing instance of the love of God to man had never existed, which has, in all ages, excited the highest joy, and love, and gratitude from his children. We might have loved God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Governor; but there would have been no place for God the Redeemer.²⁶

Because of Christ's coming there is now a place for this particular kind of intimate love.²⁷ Every sin we commit in this dispensation of grace is, according to Wesley, "an

²⁴Works, VI, 81. Note also Wesley's appeals to the teachers and students at Oxford that they consider carefully their "first love" and return to it. Cf. "Scriptural Christianity," Sermons, I, 108f.

²⁵The "fall" put redemption entirely on the level of grace and dependent on a "covenant of mercy." As such it becomes the "ground" for the work of Christ. Therefore, the possibility of restoration reflects the great mercy of God (cf. Works, VI, 238-40). We can trust Him to impart this love to us (Sermons, I, 488).

²⁶Works, VI, 224.

²⁷On God's love and the incarnation, see John Deschner, Wesley's Christology (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), p. 18; cf. Sermons, I, 319-20.

ungrateful return for infinite lovingkindness!"²⁸

Such love fulfills the law, obeying the commandments of God willingly and with a spirit of joy. In fact, God "originally designed 'faith' to reestablish the law of love."²⁹ By law here Wesley means the original moral law, which was written in the heart of first man. That law, which is co-extensive with the nature of God, was "wellnigh effaced" out of man's heart at the time of the fall, except that God in love partially re-instituted it through prevenient grace. Properly apprehended, this law of God, Wesley says, is

. . . a copy of the eternal mind, a transcript of the divine nature; yea, it is the fairest offspring of the everlasting Father, the brightest efflux of His essential wisdom, the visible beauty of the Most High. It is the delight and wonder of Cherabim and Seraphim, and all the company of heaven, and the glory and joy of every wise believer, every well-instructed child of God upon earth.³⁰

Israel's law was written on a tablet of stone. The prophets, however, declared that the moral law or law of creation would one day be written again on the hearts of man. The fulfillment of their promise was realized in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the end of the law; that is,

²⁸Works, VII, 487.

²⁹Sermons, II, 80.

³⁰Sermons, II, 47; cf. Mercer, op. cit., p. 39f.

its embodiment. Since His resurrection the Spirit uses the law to draw men to Christ. We see then that faith in God through Christ restores the moral law--the law of God's loving nature--to man. It is now written on his heart. This law, however, is in agreement with the teachings of Scripture; both are authorities in matters of religion. Of the Scripture Wesley says it "is a lantern unto a Christian's feet, and a light in all his paths. This alone he receives as his rule of right or wrong, of whatever is really good or evil."³¹ The written law complements the inner law of love.

Well aware of the danger of antinomianism Wesley constantly attempts to hold in proper tension the concepts of law and grace. They are not antagonistic to each other. The law lays down the demands of the gospel and love furnishes the inner dynamic necessary to keep it. The keeping of the moral law is not dependent on perfect obedience or works-righteousness. The one thing needful is a right spirit, a "single eye," an intention motivated by love. The law shows up our inadequacies and points out areas in need of improvement. However, love enlarges itself to include these new discoveries. So Wesley can encourage believers to fulfill the law through love.

³¹Sermons, I, 226.

Having found forgiveness of sins,

Now be zealous to receive more light daily, more of the knowledge and love of God, more of the Spirit of Christ, more of His life, and of the power of His resurrection! Now use all the knowledge, and love, and life, and power you have already attained; so shall you continually go on from faith to faith; so shall you daily increase in holy love, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and the law of love is established to all eternity.³²

Notwithstanding all that has been said thus far concerning the nature of love in the salvation of man, it still represents for Wesley only a partial restoration of the image of God. The image of God, in a moral sense, is holy love. Man controlled by the Spirit is man controlled by love. Once a slave to sin, now by faith man has been introduced to a realm of living based on the concept of personal commitment and loving response to God and man. But man is still living in what Wesley calls a "mixed state." For the believer, the power of sin has been overcome by the power of redeeming love. The obedient Christian can live with a new sense of freedom and liberty. He is no longer under the necessity to do evil. His nature has been changed. He is justified, pardoned, forgiven. He will undoubtedly gain the inheritance of the eternal kingdom of glory, if he remains faithful to the grace he has experienced. But for all this he still walks

³²Sermons, II, 83.

the lower path of Christian existence. He is gradually dying to sin and engages in good works. Yet he is not entirely renewed because his nature has not been brought completely under the domination of pure love. He does not yet have the "single eye." He is yet to be made perfect.

LOVE AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

Though not yet perfect, redeemed man's destiny is already partially fulfilled in relation to Wesley's belief in the present possible perfectibility of man in this life. Much has been written about Wesley's view of Christian perfection, a doctrine which Bishop Paul B. Kern once called, "one of the most conspicuous doctrines and emphases of Methodism."³³ Several of Wesley's sermons are devoted to exploring the subject of Christian perfection and its relation to the salvation-process; the best of which are discourses one through four in the "Sermon on the Mount" series, "The Circumcision of the Heart," "Christian Perfection," "The More Excellent Way," "On Perfection," "Satan's Devices," and "The Scripture Way of Salvation." While it exceeds the limitations of study to critically analyze the subject as a whole, yet

³³Paul B. Kern, Methodism Has a Message (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1941), p. 182.

it is important to attempt to define what Wesley means by Christian perfection and see its role in the total life of love.³⁴

On January 1, 1733, Wesley preached on the subject of "The Circumcision of the Heart" before the University of St. Mary's. The sermon was occasioned by some strong accusations published against the "Oxford Methodists" in Fogg's Journal. In the sermon Wesley responded by speaking of the essence of Christian perfection (or circumcision of the heart) as love. Circumcision of the heart is, Wesley says,

. . . that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin . . . and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus . . . so . . . as to be . . . perfect.³⁵

To be so perfected as a human means to be perfected in love.³⁶ Some of the best statements regarding what it means to be thus "perfected in love" are found in Wesley's tract, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection." In this rather lengthy treatment of Christian perfection Wesley

³⁴Of the available literature in the field, the following books are the most significant. George Allen Turner, The More Excellent Way (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1956). Cf. Harald Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification (London: Epworth Press, 1956); Sangster, op. cit.; Cox, op. cit.

³⁵Sermons, I, 267-8.

³⁶Sermons, II, 453.

offers several working definitions of what he means by the phrase. It is, he says, "the loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love."³⁷ "Christian perfection is," secondly, "pure love filling the heart, and governing all the words and actions."³⁸ Finally, "pure love reigning alone in the heart and life--this is the whole of scriptural perfection."³⁹

In the "Plain Account" Wesley sums up his mature view of Christian perfection under eleven points.⁴⁰ By the time of its last revision in 1777 Wesley's understanding of the doctrine had long been established. In fact, it was during the conferences of 1744, 1745, 1746, and 1747 that the concept took some theological shape.

³⁷Works, XI, 394.

³⁸Works, XI, 401.

³⁹Works, XI, 401.

⁴⁰Wesley's summary is as follows: (1) There is such a thing as perfection, (2) it does not come as early as justification, (3) it is not as late as death, (4) it is not absolute, (5) it does not produce human infallibility, (6) it is "salvation from sin," (7) it is "perfect love," (8) it can be enlarged (increased), (9) it can be lost, (10) it is preceded and followed by spiritual growth, (11) It is completed in a point of time. Works, XI, 441-42.

Wesley's basic view did not change after those early formative years. Turner has suggested that the distinctive elements of Wesley's view of Christian perfection can be compressed into five points, which are "(1) sanctification may be completed in this life, (2) it is distinct from, and subsequent to, regeneration, (3) it comes by faith, (4) it is gradual but often consummated in a moment, and (5) one may have the 'witness of the Spirit that this has been done in him'."⁴¹

Much of the following discussion of Wesley's view will revolve around these five points.

It will be helpful to sketch briefly the primary influence that led Wesley to think of the salvation-process in terms of a perfectionist theme. In 1725, the year of his ordination as Deacon, Wesley read Bishop Taylor's Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying.⁴² He was "exceeding affected" by that part of the book that dealt with "purity of intention" and immediately set out on a "new life" of religious practice. In the next few years he read Thomas a Kempis (The Imitation of Christ) and William Law (Treatise on Christian Perfection

⁴¹Turner, The More Excellent Way, p. 212.

⁴²Works, XI, 366-7; cf. Works, I, 98-100, where Wesley, in May, 1738, gives a brief account of his early quest for "inward holiness."

and Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life). Law's influence was such that Charles Wesley called him their (the Holy Club) "John the Baptist."⁴³ During this period Wesley developed a new interest in the Bible, especially in those passages that were concerned with a call to Christ-likeness in life.⁴⁴ An additional support for his view of Christian perfection was his knowledge of the religion of the Church "Fathers."⁴⁵ In other words, well before 1738 (Aldersgate), Wesley understood the destiny of the redeemed life in relation to a perfectionist motif. Aldersgate, however, helped him put faith and works in their proper relation to each other.

As a result of his training Wesley did not question the reality of and necessity for personal holiness.⁴⁶ While admitting that most Christians do not in fact experience the degree of love he hopes for until shortly

⁴³Mabel Richmond Brailsford, A Tale of Two Brothers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 67.

⁴⁴Works, XI, 367.

⁴⁵For the role of the "Fathers" in Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection, cf. John Wesley, John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. ix, 8-12, 30-1. Cf. L. E. Elliot-Binns, The Early Evangelicals (Greenwich: Seabury Press, 1953), p. 412.

⁴⁶Unless otherwise noted, the terms Christian perfection, sanctification, holiness, and perfect love refer to the same experience. Wesley is often inconsistent in his use of terms. Cf. John Leland Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 63.

before or at death,⁴⁷ he contends that such delay is not at all necessary or desirable. Ideally, love in Christian experience fulfills itself beyond the first realization of it in one's heart or soul. And, in turn, Christian perfection forms a base upon which love rapidly expands itself, in personal intensity and social responsibility. Peters suggests that Wesley's insistence that Christian perfection can be experienced at any given point between conversion and death is anti-Moravian, for example, against the idea that "perfection [is] the immediate result of justification by faith"--a view Wesley once held.⁴⁸

Is the experience of Christian perfection a "second work of grace" for Wesley? Some late nineteenth century critics of Wesley thought so. Emphasizing the negative aspect of Wesley's view on the cleansing from sin, for example, Boland said, "the great mistake Mr. Wesley made was in adopting the 'residue theory of regeneration' and the 'second change theory of sanctification'."⁴⁹ On the other hand Outler suggests that Wesley's emphasis is on the gradual increase of holiness in the believer's heart. "The decisive function of Wesley's doctrine of perfection,"

⁴⁷Works, XI, 402-3.

⁴⁸Peters, op. cit., p. 33.

⁴⁹J. M. Boland, The Problem of Methodism (Nashville: M.E. Church, South, 1892), p. 27.

Outler says, "was its stimulus to valid Christian aspiration and its reminder that faith is perfected in love. Teleiosis does not mean 'faithful and finished.'" It means 'up to par thus far'."⁵⁰ Outler seems close to the heart of Wesley here although Turner reminds us that Wesley's concept of "entirety" in Christian perfection naturally leads to the view that it is a second work of grace.⁵¹ In addition, Wesley's preaching on the subject indicates that he expected the believer to seek and experience something specific in terms of the perfection of love.

The failure to hold in proper tension Wesley's emphasis on experience of love (in a point of time) and its gradual increase partially results from the teaching of early American Methodism. As the doctrine of Christian perfection developed in (and out) of Methodism after Wesley's death (1791) there was in some areas great emphasis put on it as a "second definite" work of grace. For example, the National Holiness Association adopted the following definition of entire sanctification in 1885.

Entire sanctification is a second definite work of grace wrought by the Baptism of the Holy

⁵⁰Albert C. Outler, "Towards a Re-Appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian," Perkins School of Theology Journal XIV:2 (Winter, 1961), 13. The idea of progress is very prominent in the sermon "Christian Perfection."

⁵¹Turner, The More Excellent Way, p. 214.

Spirit in the heart of the believer subsequent to regeneration, received instantaneously by faith, by which the heart is cleansed from all corruption and filled with the perfect love of God.⁵²

George Failing, former editor of The Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, levels the following criticism at this definition. "Is not this," he says, "a restatement of Adam Clarke's position? Can any comparable definition be found in Wesley's works?"⁵³ Certainly the definition of the National Holiness Association reflects the dogmatism of Clarke rather than the "catholic spirit" of Wesley!

Although Wesley does not use the words "second work" in his working definitions of Christian perfection, he does come close to it in principle in the sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation." It is obvious that Wesley does mean that Christian perfection or entire sanctification is something decidedly different from justification even though the quality of grace (love) remains the same.⁵⁴ Wesley's view of the "conquering" power of love

⁵²Peters, op. cit., p. 162.

⁵³George E. Failing, "Developments in Holiness Theology After Wesley," in Kenneth Geiger (ed.) Insights Into Holiness (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1962), p. 23; for additional comment on "American holiness sects" and their supposed adherence to Wesley's teaching, see Cox, op. cit., p. 190ff.

⁵⁴Sugden's comment that Wesley is confused in his definition of "sanctification," on the one hand, and "regeneration," on the other, in the sermon "The

indicates something of its dynamic in authentic Christian experience. Love, given free reign, will eventually and entirely rule the personal aspirations, motivations, and social relationships of the believer. Love is a contagion which must move beyond the purely personal dimension. The role of love in Christian perfection is considerably more than simply completing the spiritual healing process begun at justification.

As mentioned above, the negative aspect of Christian perfection is that it cleanses the heart from sin. The complete restoration of man to the image of God means that man's heart and life are pure, at least in the sense that love conquers completely "original" sin and enables man to live without deliberate disobedience. Here Wesley finds himself at variance with what is probably the typical "Protestant" view of sin in Christian experience. For example, Calvin's concept of "evangelical perfection" does not include the "perfection of holiness in this life." Regarding this Calvin states,

To this we deem it sufficient briefly to reply with Augustine, that the goal to which all the pious ought to aspire is to appear in the

Scripture Way of Salvation" is not valid in the light of Smith's observations that Wesley understands that the gift of holiness imparts health, not life. Cf. Sermons, II, 446, n. 4; Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 114.

presence of God without spot and blemish; but the course of this present life is at best nothing more than progress, we shall never reach the goal until we have laid aside the body of sin, and been completely united to the Lord.⁵⁵

However, Wesley consistently points out that Christian perfection is at its best relative and never absolute.⁵⁶

All men, even the holiest, "have continual need of the merits of Christ . . . and may say for themselves . . . 'Forgive us our trespasses!'"⁵⁷

How does perfect love "cleanse" the heart from the sin that remains? By creating tension in the heart of the believer so that sin is kept out in proportion to the power or strength of love within. If for any reason love abates then sin springs up in the heart again. Wesley cautions believers against a misconception of perfect love and its relation to sin in human experience by saying,

The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as 'the light of the world.' For he does not give them light, but from moment to moment:

⁵⁵John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), II, 118. Luther as well said, "so original sin remains in Christians until they die, yet itself is mortified and continually dying. Its head is crushed in pieces, so that it cannot condemn us." Hugh Thompson Kerr (ed.), A Compend of Luther's Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 87; cf. Sangster, op. cit., p. 65ff. Rattenbury believes Wesley's view of Christian perfection to be more Catholic than Protestant. J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Conversion of the Wesleys (London: Epworth Press, 1938), pp. 193-206.

⁵⁶Cf. Works, XI, 374f.

⁵⁷Works, XI, 395.

The instant he withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.⁵⁸

This dynamic tension, which is maintained through obedience, is also seen in the phrase "love filling the heart, expelling pride. . . ."⁵⁹

The positive aspect of Christian perfection is love "planting" all good dispositions in the soul.⁶⁰ This love is divine in nature and means the possession of Christ-like virtues. In one sense perfect love is the result of being filled with the Spirit who imparts the mind of Christ and all of the strength necessary to live the Christian life.⁶¹ Love completely fills the heart of man, cleansing him from every "unholy affection,"⁶² and opening the believer's eyes to new dimensions of faith.⁶³ The man of pure love sees God in the natural world around

⁵⁸Works, XI, 417.

⁵⁹Works, XI, 418, emphasis mine. Cf. Sermons, II, 448.

⁶⁰Works, VII, 277.

⁶¹Sermons, I, 93f.

⁶²Sermons, I, 357f.

⁶³Sermons, I, 361f.

him, in the context of providential care, and in the ordinances of the church. Although the man of faith is persecuted by the world, he rejoices and returns good for evil.⁶⁴ Wesley sometimes refers to the "scripturally perfect" Christian as a "mature" person. Such maturity means freedom from evil thoughts and evil tempers.⁶⁵ It means loving one's neighbor and doing him good.⁶⁶ It is "religion itself!"

The "beauty" of this holiness and the reason for Wesley's enthusiasm is that it restores completely to man the image of God.⁶⁷ This image refers only to the moral image of God, however, and not to any kind of rational, intellectual, or physical image, as we have noted. The essence of Christian perfection is that it enables man to have a pure intention by filling the present capacity of his being with divine love. This pure or "single" intention is characterized by "simplicity" and "sincerity."⁶⁸

⁶⁴Sermons, I, 373f.

⁶⁵Sermons, II, 169f. Two important tracts spelling out some of the details of the "scripturally perfect" Christian are "The Character of a Methodist" and "The Principles of a Methodist." Cf. Works, VIII, 339ff.

⁶⁶Works, I, 375f.

⁶⁷Works, I, 379f.

⁶⁸Works, I, 229f.

In his sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse X" Wesley says that "all our actions . . . even those indifferent in their own nature, may be made holy, and good, and acceptable to God, by a pure and holy intention,"⁶⁹ that is, being completely devoted to God sanctifies all of man's obedient existence, even his very humanness and frailty. Borrowing from William Law, Wesley states that this "holy intention" is indispensably required by our Lord "in our ordinary business" as well as in our personal religious life.⁷⁰

On occasion Wesley says that Christian perfection imparts to the believer the "virtues" that were in Christ.⁷¹ No doubt this refers to what Wesley calls the "mind of Christ," which perfect love actualizes in the believer's experience. The sermons offer no clarification as to what Wesley means by these virtues which apparently are not normally a part of the justified Christian's experience. In 1745, Wesley wrote a letter addressed to "the Author of 'The Craftsman'" which defines "genuine virtue" as being "all which is contained in the love of God and man, producing every divine and amiable temper."⁷²

⁶⁹Works, I, 518; cf. p. 499f.

⁷⁰Works, I, 473.

⁷¹Cf. Works, I, 267-8.

⁷²Works, VIII, 513.

This sounds like "moral excellence," a common simple definition of virtue. It is difficult to see where this differs from Wesley's statement in the sermon "Christian Perfection" where he says that every genuine Christian, regardless of the depth of his experience, is "so far perfect, as not to commit sin."⁷³ If it is true, as Wesley states, that every believer can live an obedient life (not deliberately sinning) then this appears to be no different from any degree of moral excellence or virtue attainable by human beings in any stage of the salvation-process.

On the other hand, if Wesley means that this virtue is having a "single eye" to God's glory in all things as Christ did then is this a "virtue" given at the time of one's experience of Christian perfection or is it the enlargement of a virtue resident in the heart of the justified, as it appears to be? What ground would Wesley have to say that any virtue is added to the soul by an experience of the perfection of love? At the Third Annual Conference (May, 1746) a question was raised about sanctification that is of importance here.

Q. 7. Is every man as soon as he believes a new creature, sanctified, born again, pure in heart? Has he then a new heart? Does Christ dwell therein?

⁷³Sermons, II, 169.

And is he a temple of the Holy Ghost?

A. All those things may be affirmed of every believer, in a low sense. Let us not therefore contradict those who maintain it. Why should we contend about words?⁷⁴

One danger at this point, which Wesley wants to avoid, is giving the impression that justification is little more than an unsafe spiritual state.⁷⁵ Another danger which the sermons do not totally avoid is the tendency to stylize this "virtue," thereby defining it, rather than describing it and in that way giving it a true catholic nature; the latter of which represents Wesley's theology at its best. It is at this last point that Deschner sees a partial departure by Wesley from the theology of Paul.

In this light, Wesley's idea of the content of holiness--as distinct from its significance, function, motivation, and relation to our salvation--is such that it can be, in part, abstracted from the person and revelation of Christ, even though its origin may ultimately be in Him, and His is the power which effects it. And to this understanding of the content of holiness corresponds the fact that for Wesley sanctification is not primarily a participation in Christ who, as Paul says, is also our sanctification (I Cor. 1:30), but rather such a relation to Christ as allows His Spirit to establish in us a 'temper,' a more abstract, stylized kind of holiness. Wesley here follows no new path; it is the unhappy path of Protestant orthodoxy in general. Indeed, Wesley here makes

⁷⁴Wesley, John Wesley, p. 160.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 151.

his most significant departure from his own most characteristic path: from the cross to holiness. It is in this departure that the danger of a periodic identification of Wesleyan holiness with a puritan, socialist, existentialist, or any other stylized morality is greatest.⁷⁶

Lindström adequately summarizes Wesley's view of Christian perfection and its relation to the Christian life in saying, "as being synonymous with entire sanctification Christian perfection is incorporated as one of the stages in the process of salvation. It is a higher plane in the Christian life and the condition for final justification and glorification."⁷⁷

Lindström rightfully insists that Christian perfection for Wesley is only one phase, albeit a highly significant one, of the total Christian experience. Authentic Christian experience precedes it and flows from it. Its peculiar importance for Wesley lies in its God-given function to restore the moral image of God as completely as it can be restored to man this side of the Kingdom of glory. Because it is an experience of the love of God it can be enlarged although its quality cannot be improved. Thus it is normally necessary for salvation as it prepares one for entrance into the presence of God in an ultimate sense. Yet it seems part of Wesley's hope

⁷⁶Deschner, op. cit., pp. 10506; cf. p. 194.

⁷⁷Lindström, op. cit., p. 126.

that this preparation will eventually come to all believers as a result of their obedient faith. It is the believer's privilege though--and hopefully his desire--to experience it as early as possible and then to live in the strength of its power.

As with justifying grace, sanctification comes as a result of God's love and man's faith and is therefore not dependent on works. Yet, this point has not always been seen clearly by Wesleyan scholars. For example, in Cannon's conclusion to his chapter "The Moral Life and Christian Perfection" he says, "it (Christian perfection) is the end of which justification is the beginning--the final goal toward which all ethical development moves."⁷⁸ Part of the findings of this study indicate that Christian perfection is not the final goal of "ethical development." The final goal of all aspects of the authentic Christian life is service for Wesley, not personal holiness only. It is the life of love, for the justified and the entirely sanctified, which relates specifically to ethical concerns, not just Christian perfection as Cannon tends to imply. Wesley's concern for love finding its best expression in service to others would probably have been seen more clearly if he had devoted some of the sermons to specific

⁷⁸William Ragsdale Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 243.

social issues as he does in the tracts. If what Cannon seems to suggest is correct, then one could view Wesley's concept of Christian perfection as works-righteousness, the very danger Deschner warns us about.

Another approach to the role of Christian perfection in the redeemed life is found in Rothwell's recent article, "God's Extension: Ground for Sanctification." In the article Rothwell attempts to make a case for saying that personal sanctification is the ultimate redemptive relationship.

The new birth is a stage or station-stop on redemption's right-of-way leading to the blessed destination of full salvation. When we understand this, and perceive the relation between the two crises of Christian grace, then we see that the saying that 'God saves to sanctify' is a valid one. That which he saves initially, He cleanses and fulfills by the extension of His purpose and presence.⁷⁹

It is clear in the sermons of Wesley that God "saves" that man might serve; for example, the immediate goal of justification is the life of good works--the ultimate goal is the kingdom of glory. The experience of

⁷⁹Mel Thomas Rothwell, "God's Extension: Ground for Sanctification," Asbury Seminary, XXII:4 (October, 1968), 27. Simon tends to make the same mistake, that is, separating entirely the moral (ethical) from the spiritual in relation to one's experience of Christian perfection. Cf. John S. Simon, John Wesley The Master Builder (London: Epworth Press, 1955), pp. 86-7.

Christian perfection is neither gained by any kind of works-righteousness nor is it an end in itself.

The sermons give a strong indication as to the place the doctrine of Christian perfection plays in Wesley's theology. According to Wood, "in Wesley's eyes, the work of evangelism and the urging of holiness went hand in hand."⁸⁰ This is certainly true in the sense that a life of practical personal and social holiness was the goal of evangelical preaching. Doughty is really more accurate than Wood when he states that the preaching of perfection was recognized by Wesley as a theme for serious believers.⁸¹ After summing up his view of Christian perfection Wesley urges, "therefore, all our Preachers should make a point of preaching perfection to believers constantly, strongly, and explicitly; and all believers should mind this one thing, and continually agonize for it."⁸²

In the printed sermons Wesley preaches the experience of Christian perfection as a complement to God's provision in the garden for the eventual restoration of the moral image of God in man. Once this image is

⁸⁰Wood, op. cit., p. 261.

⁸¹Doughty, op. cit., p. 89.

⁸²Works, XI, 443.

restored, man's awareness of himself and his world is sharpened and his obedience to God unhindered by inner resistance due to sin. Only when love is perfected in man, that is, when it governs all his attitudes and actions, can he be said to be truly human. Christian perfection is a part of the total life of love and must be seen in its proper perspective to be understood and appreciated. For Wesley, love never fails and will eventually obtain the promise of everlasting life. Christian perfection is the intensification of one's experience of God's redeeming love to the extent of the exclusion of original sin and the magnification of existing Christian graces. This love, as all genuine love, continues to flow to others and patiently awaits the promised physical and spiritual restoration.

LOVE AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

For Wesley, the "royal law" is summed up by Jesus in the statement, "therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."⁸³ In the Notes, on Matthew 7:12, Wesley says, "the whole (law and prophets) is comprised in one word--Imitate the God of love."⁸⁴

⁸³Sermons, I, 529.

⁸⁴Notes, p. 42.

In order to do this, however, one must be participating in the life of love. In Wesley's thought the first thing necessary for Christian existence is to repair the damage done by sin to the inner man. Once that has been accomplished by justification then man, in turn, can live redemptively toward others.

By "imitating" the love of God, Wesley means that the Christian man must place the same value on others that God placed on man in general in the ministry of Jesus. For Wesley, one need only look at the cross to see the depth of God's caring for humanity. Preaching on "What is Man?" Wesley says,

The Son of God was 'God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,' in glory equal with the Father, in majesty co-eternal, . . . was obedient unto death. . . . After this demonstration of his love, is it possible to doubt any longer of God's tender regard for man; even though he was 'dead in trespasses and sins?'⁸⁵

The evangelical man's eyes are opened by faith to see this love--this "loving, gracious God."⁸⁶ To imitate this love is to become involved with the other man, to live redemptively toward him and demonstrate the love of God to him.

It is clear in Wesley's writings that one who has experienced the love of God in turn expresses his

⁸⁵Works, VI, 172; cf. p. 235f.

⁸⁶Sermons, I, 192.

gratitude to God by keeping His commandments,⁸⁷ part of which is to love one's brother or neighbor.⁸⁸ In his sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse II" Wesley says the Lord's statement, "blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy," is directed toward the idea of "brotherly love."⁸⁹ As a description of the nature of this "brotherly love" Wesley draws on I Corinthians 13, especially verses four through seven which contain the "nature and properties" of authentic love.⁹⁰ In enumerating the several points of the nature of love in this scripture, Wesley bases his view of love on the intrinsic worth of the other man and the enabling power of God for a redeemed man to love the other as himself. Essentially this love "destroys all high conceits engendering pride; and makes us rejoice to be as nothing, to be little and vile, the lowest of all, the servant of all."⁹¹ It enables man to transcend himself in that "he covets no man's silver, or gold, or apparel: he desires nothing but the salvation of their souls. . . ."⁹²

⁸⁷Sermons, I, 214f.

⁸⁸Sermons, I, 450f.

⁸⁹Sermons, I, 345-6.

⁹⁰Cf. Notes, on I Cor. 13, p. 625; Sermons, I, 346-54; Works, VII, 47f.

⁹¹Sermons, I, 348.

⁹²Sermons, I, 345.

At times this love for (or "good of") the neighbor is the same thing basically as the glory of God.⁹³

Wesley defines such brotherly love as

. . . a calm, generous, disinterested benevolence to every child of man. This earnest, steady goodwill to our fellow-creature never flowed from any foundation but gratitude to our Creator. And if this be . . . the very essence of virtue, it follows that virtue can have no being, unless it spring from the love of God.⁹⁴

In Wesley's early ministry he believed that man's love for God stemmed from man's appreciation of the perfections of God. Gradually he shifted his position to its present form; for example, man's love to God comes from man's gratitude to God for His prior love.⁹⁵ As seen above, the love of God acts on man in a redemptive manner. Man in turn reacts in loving obedience toward God. Therefore, man's love for his fellow man is a specific expression of this gratitude to God. This again is man imitating the love of God since redeemed man loves the other without being motivated to do so for any reason other than his own experience of the love of God.

Wesley's appeals for manifesting a type of social love are based first on one's love for God and second on

⁹³Sermons, I, 352.

⁹⁴Works, VI, 359. On "disinterested love" Wesley says, ". . . all true love is disinterested, 'seeketh not her own'. . . ." Works, IX, 31.

⁹⁵Cf. Works, XII, 212.

one's love for the other man. For example, in his sermon "The Reward of the Righteous" Wesley urges his hearers to Christian obedience based on their desire for Christ-likeness in their lives.

To you who believe the Christian Revelation, I may speak in a still stronger manner. You believe, your blessed Master 'left you an example, that you might tread in his steps.' Now, you know his whole life was one labour of love. You know 'how he went about doing good,' and that without intermission; declaring to all, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Is not that, then, the language of your heart?⁹⁶

The power necessary to turn a man from himself toward others comes only from God. God's freeing action in man's life (freedom from the power of sin and freedom to live the life of love) enables man to actually love God and man. The quality of love toward each is the same; the difference is that one has priority in time. There is no indication in the sermons of Wesley that the intensity of this love is less for the neighbor than for the Father. Man loves God with all his being and, as a result, loves his neighbor as himself.

Appeals can be made to the non-Christian, for Wesley, to act in a benevolent manner toward others; the poor, for example. Such appeals are made on the basis of man's natural "feelings of humanity."⁹⁷ That is,

⁹⁶Works, VII, 138.

⁹⁷Works, VII, 137.

non-Christians are often motivated to good behavior by a concern for the human needs of others. For Wesley, non-Christians can be moved by "compassion," "kind impressions," "sympathy," and as a result be "generous" because of a "willing mind." However, actions based on such feelings or motivations are not "good works," since (strictly speaking) good works can only be done after initial justification.⁹⁸ So Niebuhr is correct in seeing Wesley's ethic as a conversionist ethic.⁹⁹ Such an ethic can have little relationship to "institutions" and at times this appears to be the case with Wesley. Actually he is concerned with the redemption of institutions, but from the standpoint of the individual. For Wesley, the truly ethical, in terms of Christian love, is dependent on one's voluntary commitment to Christ who brings about an inner change in man from pride (love of self) to disinterested love (the free love of others). Wesley's ethic begins with individual commitment and in that light only does it have social significance.

In this section we have attempted thus far to show that Christian social responsibility springs from the experience of love that begins at the time of the new

⁹⁸Cannon, op. cit., p. 147.

⁹⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 218f.

birth. That Wesley does not intend to relegate ethical responsibility to the experience of Christian perfection alone is clear. For example, in his preaching on the "beatitudes" of Jesus he lists the first five as having specific reference to Christian experience prior to any experiential knowledge of perfect love. In order, these five are: (1) poverty of spirit, (2) mourning, (3) meekness, (4) hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and (5) merciful. The sixth beatitude concerns the "pure in heart" or those who have experienced Christian perfection so as to be purified "from every unholy affection" and who now "love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and mind, and strength."¹⁰⁰ The seventh and eighth beatitudes are concerned with peacemakers and those persecuted for righteousness sake. Both beatitudes five and seven deal with social expressions of the life of love and neither represents a lower form of experience than the other. In fact, while waiting for entire sanctification or Christian perfection the believer is to be engaged in good works; works of piety and works of mercy.¹⁰¹ Thus, the social responsibilities of Christian love are seen by Wesley in relation to the whole

¹⁰⁰Sermons, I, 357-8.

¹⁰¹Cf. Sermons, I, 340, 45-6; where such works are to be done before entire sanctification.

of the life of love, not just one aspect of it.

In terms of Christian social relations, love creates a unity among Christian believers. Nowhere is this common bond more evident for Wesley than in the church. Throughout his ministry he consistently admonished Methodists not to consider separating from the Established Church because in his mind this action negated true brotherly love.

To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united, is a grievous breach of the law of love. It is the nature of love to unite us together; and the greater the love, the stricter the union. And when this continues in its strength, nothing can divide these whom love has united. It is only when our love grows cold, that we can think of separating from our brethren. . . . And as such a separation is evil in itself, being a breach of brotherly love, so it brings forth evil fruit; it is naturally productive of the most mischievous consequences.¹⁰²

Wesley did recognize occasions which might warrant separation from some Christian group, but such a situation would be rare; the exception, not the rule.¹⁰³ As Christians, Wesley believes we are required to have a certain kind of love toward other believers, what he calls "peculiar" love. That is, in spite of such hinderances as differences of religious opinion or forms of religious

¹⁰²Works, VI, 406.

¹⁰³Works, VI, 408.

worship we are constrained to love--and such love unites in spite of the reality of such hinderances.¹⁰⁴

This same quality of self-giving love is to be exercised toward the non-Christian world as well. Although more cautious about intimate relationships, in terms of social contact, marriage, etc., Wesley preaches that believers are to seek the good of others in at least two ways. First, we are to do all in our capacity to do good to their bodies. This entails, inasmuch as it is possible, total care for their material and physical necessities. Second, we are to do every possible good for the benefit of their souls; to attempt to secure their salvation. Therefore, love dictates that the believer maintain a type of servant role, not only to the brethren, but to society also. The believer, individually or perhaps better as the church, stands against society as its judge by exposing wrongs within it, while at the same time, stands ready to serve it within the limits of Christian love and caution.

¹⁰⁴Sermons, II, 130. Some of the implications of Wesley's view of a "catholic spirit," as an ecumenical concern, have been spelled out by Roy S. Nicholson, "John Wesley and Ecumenicity," Wesleyan Theological Journal, II:1 (Spring, 1967), 66-81; cf. Williams, op. cit., p. 13f. For Wesley's attitude toward "non-conformity" see Robert Monk, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), pp. 194-201.

In summary, the life of good works begins, for Wesley, in response to God's justifying grace. It is at first an individual response to God's love. Since man does not live in isolation the ramifications of Christian commitment are many. So much so, in fact, that one act of mercy is actually many good acts; or many good acts stem from what appears to be only a single Christian act. For Wesley, love seeks ways to express itself; partly as a result of man's gratitude to God for personal redemption. Love of the neighbor is not dependent on one's evaluation of the neighbor but on one's relation to God. Wesley sees the possibility of men living together in peace if they are motivated by God's peace and forgiveness. Of course, the more love can be actualized in the believer's heart, the more it can be realized in human relations. Perfect love, theoretically, should eventually become the basic attitude of conduct among believers. Love has such power in human relations that it can effectively overcome the debilitating effects of conflict in personality, lack of understanding, and imperfections in performance.

LOVE AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Wesley's concept of the destiny of redeemed man ultimately revolves around his concern for the restoration of the image of God in man. Without faith man's moral

nature conforms in large part to the image of evil. By faith man's nature is radically changed at the "new birth" so that love becomes the motivating factor in all of his relations. Thus, repentance and faith combine in Wesley's thought to begin the restoring process. Growth in love toward the ultimate perfection of man's intention is part of man's post-conversion experience. When by a clearer apprehension of himself (his spiritual needs) and God (His provision for sin) man experiences not only growth toward Christian perfection but the fact itself then another plateau in the spiritual life has been reached. Yet this is not the end of faith and so love continues to be increased, looking forward to the day of complete restoration, physically as well as spiritually. Therefore, man's destiny is related to two times (present and future) as well as two worlds (material and spiritual). Man's hope leads him to expect an eschatological confirmation of his faith in the message of the kingdom.

Wesley is very much interested in matters related to certain eschatological doctrines. He is firmly convinced that any future hope is linked to present opportunities and responsibilities. The following excerpt from his sermon, "Satan's Devices," is typical of his view of this relationship.

Our eye may be insensibly turned aside from
that crown which the Righteous Judge hath promised

to give at that day 'to all them that love His appearing'; and we may be drawn away from the view of that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved in heaven for us. But this also would be a loss to our souls, and an obstruction to our holiness. For to walk in the continued sight of our goal, is a needful help in our running the race which is set before us.¹⁰⁵

However, he is not as sure of the specifics of what lies ahead of the believer, as he is of the general facts. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that he is more interested in the practical implications and application of certain broad phases of eschatology than a precise theological definition of them.¹⁰⁶

Notwithstanding the lack of attention Wesley often gives to specifics in the eschatological process, especially in the sermons, he views the future with optimism. McDowney catches Wesley's enthusiasm at this point.

¹⁰⁵Sermons, II, 198.

¹⁰⁶One example of this is Wesley's uncritical acceptance in the Notes of Bengel's bi-millennium theory. Cf. Wesley's comment on Revelation 20:5, p. 1039; also Wesley's introduction to the Book of Revelation, Notes, p. 932; H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1958), III, 277-78. Compare with John Albert Bengel, Gnomon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: Clark, 1858), V, 373. This kind of laxness on Wesley's part had led Nagler to suggest that Wesley is relatively unconcerned about "eschatological considerations." Arthur Wilford Nagler, Pietism and Methodism (Nashville: M.E. Church, South, 1918), p. 84.

A spirit of optimism swept over Wesley as he contemplated the future. He admitted that there was much sin in the world in which he lived, but he saw the hand of God working for the ultimate salvation of vast numbers of people. He believed that God was at work in his own day bringing about a new concern for the kingdom of God.¹⁰⁷

Thus it can be said of Wesley that for him the ultimate, all-embracing eschatological reality is the kingdom of God, especially in its manifestation as the kingdom of glory.

The kingdom of God, for Wesley, has two phases,¹⁰⁸ the present ever-enlarging kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory.¹⁰⁹ As the kingdom of grace, the kingdom of God is a present inward experience. It is actually the reign of God in the life of man. The two conditions necessary for the realization of this inward kingdom are repentance and faith. By repentance, Wesley means to

¹⁰⁷James Edward McEldowney, "John Wesley's Theology in Its Historical Setting" (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1943), p. 170.

¹⁰⁸"The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are but two phrases for the same thing. They mean, not barely a future happy state in heaven, but a state to be enjoyed on earth. . . . It properly signifies here (Matt. 3:2) the gospel dispensation. . . . In some places of Scripture the phrase more particularly denotes the state of it on earth; in others, it signifies only the state of glory, but it generally includes both." Notes, p. 22.

¹⁰⁹Cf. Deschner's comments on Wesley's view of these two aspects of the kingdom. Deschner, op. cit., p. 126.

"know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art."¹¹⁰ By faith, Wesley means to believe in the gospel, the sum of which is found in John 3:16. "Believe this and the kingdom is thine."¹¹¹ In this fashion God begins to govern our lives. "Let God have the sole dominion over you," Wesley says, "let Him reign without a rival: let Him possess all your heart, and rule alone."¹¹² The fruit of God's reigning in the heart is righteousness which is principally "the love of God and of all mankind."¹¹³ Therefore, once the conditions are met an individual will actually enjoy a foretaste of heavenly glory.

Wesley's views of the present experience of the coming kingdom of glory has led Williams to suggest that he has a type of "realized eschatology." Williams, understanding of this realized eschatology is in relation to Wesley's emphasis on the kingdom of God and the experience

¹¹⁰Sermons, I, 155f.; cf. Sermons, II, 394 which is a summary of the essence of repentance and faith.

¹¹¹Sermons, I, 159.

¹¹²Sermons, I, 506.

¹¹³Sermons, I, 506-7.

of Christian perfection.¹¹⁴ Following Henry Carter, Williams sees this emphasis, on Christian perfection or "holiness," in relation to three religious concepts: (1) the new way of life--inward holiness reaching out to produce social holiness; (2) inward religion--an eschatological foretaste of perfection; (3) social religion--the present partial realization of the ultimate kingdom.¹¹⁵ Actually Wesley's understanding of what Williams has called "realized eschatology" is simply his view of the nature of the change which God effects in the believing life. Wesley's language is clothed in the traditional terminology of the day and should be taken at face value, for example, with minimum interpretation. Certainly the sermons do show, for Wesley, that although Christian experience anticipates the future, yet it now enjoys something of that relationship with God which will be

¹¹⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 194. Bomer also sees a type of "realized eschatology" in the Eucharistic hymns of the Wesleys. For example, the following verse,

"By faith and hope already there
Ev'n now the marriage feast we share.
Ev'n now by the Lamb we are fed,
Our Lord's celestial joy we prove.

Cf. John C. Bomer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1951), pp. 184-5.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 194-8.

fully known only in some future manifestation.¹¹⁶

Wesley's confidence in the power of God's love to conquer the power of sin in man and release his spiritual potential was partially confirmed in what Outler calls the "third decade" of the revival.¹¹⁷ By 1762, with the awakening in London and other cities,¹¹⁸ Wesley believed that the "day of Pentecost" had finally come; for the most part because of the numerous professions to Christian perfection.¹¹⁹ For Wesley it must have seemed that a new era was dawning, especially since persecution from the Established Church was lessening and spiritual victories were recorded throughout the land. Speaking on "The General Spread of the Gospel" Wesley expresses his optimism regarding God's present work and its future possibilities.

¹¹⁶Whatever the nature of this experience for Wesley, it is not akin to his concept of mysticism since he considers mystics as the "most dangerous" enemies of Christianity. Journal, I, 420; cf. Outler's comments on Wesley's "rift" with the Moravians, Wesley, John Wesley, pp. 353f; 375-6.

¹¹⁷Wesley, John Wesley, p. 22.

¹¹⁸According to Peters, the awakening had begun as early as 1759 and would last until 1763. 1762 would catch the revival at its crest with the fruits of three years to substantiate any claims to success. Cf. Peters, op. cit., p. 31. Turner considers 1762 a pivotal year in Wesley's own understanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection, doubtless because of the numerous witnesses to the experience. Turner, The More Excellent Way, p. 168.

¹¹⁹Journal, III, 116.

All unprejudiced persons may see with their eyes that He is already renewing the face of the earth: And we have strong reason to hope that the work he hath begun, he will carry on unto the day of the Lord Jesus; that he will never intermit the blessed work of his Spirit, until he has fulfilled all his promises, until he hath put a period to sin, and misery, and infirmity, and death, and re-established universal holiness and happiness, and caused all the inhabitants of the earth to sing together, 'Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!' 'Blessing, and Glory, and wisdom, and honor and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever.'¹²⁰

For Wesley, the present spiritual kingdom of grace leads to the coming kingdom of glory.¹²¹ This is the second larger aspect of the kingdom of God. As Wesley sees it, we are now reaping the "first-fruits" of the Spirit and the "harvest" is coming; not only as the present perfection of love but as an eschatological hope.¹²² This present time is probably the time of the

¹²⁰Works, VI, 288. For all practical purposes, Wesley's adoption of Bengel's bi-millennial theory leaves him with a postmillennial view of the end of the world; that is, that the second coming of Christ occurs after the millennial period. Cf. Wiley, op. cit., II, 290n, 310n. Harris Franklin Rall, Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope (New York: Abingdon Press, 1929), pp. 245; 250.

¹²¹"Salvation is synonymous with the whole of a man's spiritual activity; it extends from the very moment of its inception until either its extinction in sin and death or else its final culmination and glorification in that which lies beyond this world of sense and time. It is God's present, continuing, and full possession of a man's life." Cannon, op. cit., p. 119; cf. p. 250; Lindström, op. cit., pp. 200-4; Williams, op. cit., p. 200.

¹²²Sermons, II, 192-3.

"latter-day glory" when God has begun to "display his power" and "fulfill" his gracious promise that "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."¹²³ Eventually we will return to a garden-like atmosphere wherein man and the brute creation will be at peace.¹²⁴ The perfection of love in the believer's experience looks toward the event of resurrection when restoration will be fully realized in body as it has been in soul.¹²⁵ God Himself will be present in the newly created order. "Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness, far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise."¹²⁶ In the kingdom of glory the destinies of redeemed man and the created order are realized.

Whenever the words, "Thy kingdom come," are prayed, "we pray for the coming of His everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth."¹²⁷ There is not a radical dichotomy between these two complementary concepts of the one kingdom of God, as we have seen. For

¹²³Works, VI, 307.

¹²⁴Works, VI, 248ff.

¹²⁵Works, VI, 276.

¹²⁶Works, VI, 296.

¹²⁷Sermons, I, 437.

example, sanctifying grace, or the process of the perfecting of love, which is begun with the new birth and amplified in Christian perfection continues to increase in the kingdom of glory.¹²⁸

Wesley says in his sermon "On Faith" that the departed spirits of the redeemed "swiftly increase in knowledge, in holiness, and in happiness in their new environment."¹²⁹ Wesley does not give any indication that this process of growth will ever cease. It seems that in Wesley's thinking man's potential for experiencing God's love is therefore determined partly by his particular state of existence. In the kingdom of glory all earthly hinderances to holiness will be removed and thus man's potential for love is unlimited. Therefore, the destiny of man is not realized ultimately in terms of simply "going to heaven," that is, of having reached a final fixed state, but rather in that aspect of the salvation-process that frees man to unlimited opportunity to experience the love of God. From this perspective it can be said that man's destiny, although determined by free choice and confirmed in increasingly greater degrees at certain stages of human existence, is always becoming.

¹²⁸Works, XI, 402; Deschner, op. cit., pp. 137-8.

¹²⁹Works, VII, 328.

Concerning the Kingdom of God, the destiny of man, for Wesley, is seen in terms of two concepts; the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. Thus, eschatological concepts are related to the life of love primarily in relation to the fulfillment of hope, the resurrection of the body, and the enjoyment of God's presence in a manner not in keeping with earthly existence. Love is the primary identifying badge of Christian discipleship for Wesley and is, therefore, part of the total redemptive process. Its relation to eschatological concerns, particularly the kingdom of glory, is not as clear as it might be, but it is evident in Wesley's sermons that love's power can continue without abatement through all phases of one's experience of the kingdom. The greatness of the kingdom of glory lies in its possibilities for continued personal spiritual development.

CONCLUSION

For Wesley, the destiny of redeemed man is realized in relation to his understanding of the life of love. Authentic love is a divinely given force that not only captivates man's loyalty but ever enlarges itself and seeks ways of making itself known. In essence, this love is the primary characteristic of Christian experience and flows, with greater or lesser intensity, through the

entirety of the life of faith. This love is given at justification, intensified in Christian perfection, expressed meaningfully in social relationships, and opened to endless development in the kingdom of glory. Thus, the idea of the life of love may be seen in Wesley's sermons as the main thread holding together the several particulars of the salvation-process in relation to the total destiny of man.

It is typical of writers on Wesley's theology to see Wesley's view of the salvation-process mainly in relation to his concept of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. It can be said, generally, that Protestant theology associates justification with the beginning of Christian experience and sanctification with the life that follows. This means that sanctification is a process concerned with the deepening of personal commitment and the sense of ethical responsibility in the life of faith.

In Wesley's understanding of the possibilities of grace for man this general scheme is only partially true. While it is representative, by and large, of the experience of most Christians, yet Wesley believes the normal progress of grace should carry one beyond it; that is, sanctification can itself, in one sense, be completed in this life. Only in the broadest sense can the word

"sanctification" be used, for Wesley, in reference to the total experience of the Christian and even then significant distinctions must be made. One can say, in the general framework of Wesley's thought, that sanctification is divided into four phases: (1) initial (justification and regeneration), (2) progressive (growth in grace), (3) entire (Christian perfection, holiness), and (4) final (eternal life).

At times, writers on Wesley's ethics tend to identify the general idea of obedience (largely in terms of good works) with the experience of entire sanctification. I have tried to show in this chapter that Christian ethics, for Wesley, can be identified much more readily with the idea of "progressive sanctification" than with "entire sanctification." Progressive sanctification includes all of the enlarging elements of Christian experience related to Christian ethics; for which initial sanctification is their beginning, entire sanctification their intensification, and final sanctification their completion.

Properly speaking, personal ethics and social responsibility belong to the total life of love and flow from every experience of it rather than the one phase of entire sanctification. The experience of entire sanctification probably increases and clarifies one's sensitivity

to ethical responsibility, but it is in no sense the beginning of it. Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, primarily relates for Wesley, to the increase of love in individual Christian experience. The social dimensions of such a concept of grace have yet to be explored.

In Wesley's sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," good works are discussed in relation to entire sanctification, but such works precede as well as follow it. The same is true for Wesley's sermons on the Sermon on the Mount, where good works are seen as a part of the total life of love. In general, Wesley was out to "remake" the world after the image of Christ. That image is the personal embodiment of God's love!

CHAPTER IV

WESLEY'S PREACHING ON ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

The shape of Wesley's ethics begins to show with his experiences in the Holy Club at Oxford.¹ Not only were the Methodists regular about personal devotions and attendance upon the sacrament, but their religious zeal extended to such social services as relief of the poor and the prisoners (at Newgate, for example). While such works were performed in Wesley's early ministerial career as a crutch to an unsure faith,² they were later seen by him to be an indispensable part of authentic faith. Wesley's post-Aldersgate understanding of Christian faith effectively blends together the Protestant concept of salvation sola fide, sola gratis,³ and the Puritan emphasis on obedience.⁴

The printed sermons contain a great deal of information relative to Wesley's concern for ethical responsibility. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to attempt

¹Cf. John S. Simon, John Wesley and The Religious Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 91ff.; also V. H. H. Green, The Young Mr. Wesley (New York: St. Martins Press, 1961), p. 157ff.

²Simon, op. cit., pp. 126-7.

³Cf. William Ragsdale Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 87f.

⁴Cf. Robert C. Monk, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 139ff.

to discover Wesley's view of the ethical responsibility of Christian faith as contained in the printed sermons with an emphasis on four particulars: (1) the role of the sermon in ethical instruction, (2) the nature of the world, (3) the nature of good works, and (4) advice on ethical behavior.

THE SERMON AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

McCulloh rightly observes that "preaching and discipline were the bench marks of the early Methodist movement."⁵ "Listening to sermons," Marlowe says, "played the same role in Methodism as Bible-reading had played in the early days of Puritanism."⁶ Of course, Wesley's personal emphasis on preaching is well known.⁷ According to Wesley the preacher seeks (1) to invite, (2) to convince, (3) to offer Christ, and (4) to build up.⁸

⁵Gerald O. McCulloh, "The Discipline of Life in Early Methodism Through Preaching and Other Means of Grace," in Dow Kirkpatrick (ed.) The Doctrine of the Church (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 162.

⁶John Marlowe, The Puritan Tradition in English Life (London: Cresset Press, 1956), pp. 44-5.

⁷The number of sermons preached by Wesley have been variously estimated from 40,000 to 52,000. Cf. Maximin Piette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937), p. 375; W. L. Doughty, John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 204; McCulloh, op. cit., p. 174.

⁸John Wesley, John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 144.

Therefore, he designs the sermons to complement the needs of the whole man, from conviction and conversion to practical helps on how to live the Christian life. In fact, he attempts to incorporate some of each of these aspects in almost every sermon.⁹

One of the distinguishing marks of the "true" prophet (preacher) of God, for Wesley, is his evident concern for others. On the other hand, the false prophet, Wesley says, teaches "the way of pride, of levity, of passion, of worldly desires, of loving pleasure more than God, of unkindness to our neighbor, of unconcern for good works. . . ." ¹⁰ As early as the Georgia Mission Wesley learned of the general resistance to the social concern of the "prophet," particularly when he mixed his concern over the slave trade and the liquor industry with his preaching. ¹¹ His experience at Aldersgate sealed his growing opposition to any type of mysticism and its unconcern for the social order. In 1739 he contrasted authentic Christian faith with mysticism by saying,

⁹For Wesley's understanding of how to preach, especially in relation to obedience and the "law," cf. Letters, III, 79ff. This is a very important letter regarding Wesley's theology of preaching and his view of man.

¹⁰Sermons, II, 14.

¹¹Cf. Simon, op. cit., p. 150.

The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. . . . And, in truth, whosoever loveth his brethren not in word only, but as Christ loved him, cannot but be zealous of good works. He feels in his soul a burning, restless desire of spending and being spent for them.¹²

It is primarily as a preacher of personal and social holiness that Wesley looks at the world as "his parish." "By the preaching of justification by faith and the possibility of the assurance of salvation," Simon states, "[the Wesleys] had discovered the weapons which prevailed in the fight against the worldliness of the Church and the wickedness of the nation."¹³ It is evident that Wesley expects the right preaching of the gospel to result not only in changed attitudes, but changed conduct. His confidence in the power of God to change not only men's lives but social conditions as well was strengthened by what occurred in towns like St. Just¹⁴ and Cornwall,¹⁵ towns that at one time were quite evil. As Cell observes, Wesley had left his earlier humanist concern for a man-made faith and, in the tradition of the Reformers,

¹²Simon, op. cit., p. 247.

¹³Ibid., pp. 220-1.

¹⁴John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p. 188.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 226-7.

proclaimed a God-given faith.¹⁶ It is in the content of his preaching on justification that Niebuhr can see a conversionist-ethic displayed.¹⁷

Thus, the sermon, for Wesley, was considerably more than an evangelistic device. It was a means of communicating "practical Christianity" as well as its theology. Simon suggests that "after calm exposition the printed sermons became ardent appeals to those who were present to practice the neglected duties of the Christian life."¹⁸ Their highly practical nature no doubt played a large part in their popularity.¹⁹ Of course, the theology of the sermons was of great significance, but, as we have already noted, Wesley was really not dogmatic concerning theological formulas, believing that a proper experience of faith did not depend on a proper comprehension of it theologically.

¹⁶George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Holt, 1935), p. 191f.

¹⁷Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), p. 218f. For specific references to a conversionist-ethic motif see Wesley's description of the change conversion brings about in man in his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (Sermons, II, 446). The same idea is contained in "A Caution Against Bigotry" (Sermons, II, 112); "The Reformation of Manners," (Sermons, II, 490); "National Sins and Miseries" (Works, VII, 400-9), wherein Wesley states that national spiritual ills can only be changed as individuals respond in faith to God.

¹⁸John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 164.

¹⁹Cf. Doughty, op. cit., p. 161.

Commenting on the primacy of the experience of faith rather than a proper intellectual apprehension of it in Wesley's thought, Rattenbury says,

. . . he saw clearly that Christianity was essentially a life, and that action was of more importance than thought, and that love and faith mattered more than any sort of speculations or notions. . . . Wesley, though a trained academic, was a man of affairs, and though an intellectual, he did not despise the emotional life. More than any other great religious leader, he touched life and human beings at all points necessary for deep and sound judgments. . . . His religion and his religious system held the balance truly between individualistic and social religion.²⁰

Notwithstanding Wesley's feeling for the preaching task (in evangelizing and instructing), the sermons could not have accomplished Wesley's goals without the "societies." A word about the relationship between the society and the Church of England is necessary at this point, although we need not discuss it at length since much has been written on this general theme. Todd correctly observes that Wesley has no strict theological definition of the church;²¹ Outler sees this as a contemporary problem of Methodism.²² In his sermon "Of the Church" Wesley

²⁰J. Ernest Rattenbury, Wesley's Legacy to the World (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1928), pp. 171-2.

²¹John M. Todd, John Wesley and the Catholic Church (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), p. 166.

²²Albert C. Outler, "Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church," in Kirkpatrick, op. cit., pp. 24-5.

confesses that "a more ambiguous word than this, the church, is scarce to be found in the English language."²³

So Wesley tends to accept uncritically the Church of England's pre-seventeenth century definition of the church,²⁴ which is,

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance; in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.²⁵

Williams sees the unification of three traditions in this definition of the church which Wesley accepted.²⁶ First, Wesley's emphasis on living faith (see in "faithful men") in fellowship represents the Free Church tradition in which men are united on the basis of a common confession (not a common creed). Nowhere is this more clear than in the society where membership was based simply on the "desire to flee the wrath to come." This represents Wesley's "catholic spirit." Second, the preaching of the

²³Works, VI, 392.

²⁴Cf. James Edward McEldowney, "John Wesley's Theology in its Historical Setting" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1943), p. 148.

²⁵Henry Wheeler, History and Exposition of the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), p. 237.

²⁶Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 142ff.

Word emphasizes the broad Protestant base from which Wesley worked. Williams further suggests that Wesley's view of preaching is more significant for the formation of the church (its historical presence) than its visible ecclesiastical structure.²⁷ Third, the role of the sacraments as stemming from the Catholic tradition with its emphasis on the presence of Christ is important for Wesley, but without the Catholic concept of transubstantiation.²⁸

On the other hand, the "society" or a small group of church members seeking renewed spirits was already well established in England prior to Wesley's utilization of it.²⁹

As early as 1678 societies were formed in England whose design was the cultivation of personal holiness and the "love of man." John's father, Samuel, was in favor of the existence of such societies and his mother, Susanna, actively participated in them. There is a sense in which

²⁷"It is clear that Wesley placed great emphasis upon the classical Protestant view with its emphasis on the necessity for the church to be continually formed by the "event" in which faith is aroused by the true preaching of the Word." Ibid., p. 143. Michalson would probably object to the emphasis Williams places on preaching at this point. Cf. Carl Michalson, Worldly Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 127.

²⁸Works, X, 117-19.

²⁹Cf. Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies, p. 14ff.

the Holy Club at Oxford was an extension of the concept of the society. In the Holy Club tradition Wesley started a society for serious Christians at Savannah during his Georgia mission. So, given the condition of the church being what it was in 1739,³⁰ Wesley's own heritage and experience led him to adopt the "society" at the outset of what was destined to be the Great Revival.

Basically, the society stood as a complement to Wesley's preaching.³¹ Wesley believes that one's response to Christ's call for commitment involves a change in actual life as well as the inward attitude. The societies, under his direction, were to encourage faith by spreading "scriptural holiness over the land."³² Thus, the role of the societies was one of a Christian subculture within English society.³³ To further facilitate the objective of guidance in the Christian life, in 1743 Wesley structured the "General Rules" and the "Select Societies." As

³⁰Cf. J. R. Green, A Short History of the English People (New York: Everyman's Library, 1964), p. 692ff.; especially J. H. Whiteley, Wesley's England (London: Epworth Press, 1954), pp. 295-330.

³¹Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, pp. 57, 78.

³²Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies, p. 334.

³³For a study of the "class meeting" in the society in this regard, see Gloster S. Udy, Key to Change (Sidney: Pettigrew, 1962), pp. 35-64.

the Society itself, generally speaking, developed it became quite involved in English life. The society, Wesleyan or not, existed to encourage good works as well as to provide spiritual incentives in faith.³⁴ Hence, it is not surprising that at times various societies were used to aid the poor, serve as relief stations during times of emergency, and all too generally to attempt to raise the level of morality in the nation.

As the Methodist movement spread over England and Wales, extending itself to Scotland and Ireland, the societies grew so rapidly that "preaching-houses" had to be built to accommodate the people who turned away from the established church. By the fifth Conference in 1748--ten years after Aldersgate--nine districts had been approved as areas of Methodist work and as many men appointed as overseers of the work.³⁵ It is difficult to think that during these early years Wesley hoped the

³⁴Udy says, "the chief concern of members was spiritual regeneration: secular action was not originally planned, yet the instrument, preparing and training leaders who inaugurated social changes, was the class meeting." Ibid., p. 106.

³⁵The districts and men appointed to them were London (John or Charles Wesley), Stafford (James Jones), Cheshire (John Bennet), York (William Shent), Newcastle (John Downes), Ireland (John Haughton and Jonathan Reeves), Wales (William Thomas), Bristol and Cornwall (John Jones).

societies would always retain their affiliation with the Church of England. However, by the time of the third quarter of the century, a number of factors had combined that resulted, for all practical purposes, in a new church.³⁶ Notwithstanding the changing role of the "societies," Wesley's original vision for his work remained the same and until his death he continued to combine the preaching and, in a more limited sense, pastoral ministries to "reform the church" and "spread scriptural holiness over the land."

The printed sermons reflect Wesley's concern for theological ethics and their practical application. The thirteen sermons in the Sermon on the Mount series form an adequate base for Wesley's view of the ethical in Christian terms. We have tried to establish the fact that Wesley's

³⁶Eayrs suggests that the practical separation of the Wesleyan Societies from the Established Church began as early as 1758. Eayrs sees eight specific acts of Wesley as leading to the founding of a new church. "He (Wesley) conducted unauthorized and new services; instituted a new fellowship; erected separate buildings for worship; employed laymen as preachers without regular episcopal sanction or ordination; held annual conferences for the definition of doctrine and for the functions of a Church court; executed legal instruments to give continuity to his Church organization; provided a Church constitution with Church services for his followers in America and later in England, and appointed superintendents for these Churches; and he ordained some of his preachers to give the Sacraments." George Eayrs, John Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1926), pp. 207, 207-26.

ethic--living in a right relationship to God and doing good to others--is based on God's free gift of love to man.³⁷ The Sermon on the Mount series is based on this divine love as it is imparted to and improved on in human experience. It can be said that the Sermon on the Mount is concerned with genuine love, spoken of as "holiness," and the process of cultivating a "right intention" and guarding it against loss. Although the particulars of this new life of love are to be partially expounded on in the sermons and tracts of Wesley, the bulk of specific instances of ethical action are left to the ministries of the class meetings, bands, et cetera.

The genius of the sermon, as concerns its educational functions for ethics, for Wesley, does not rest in its attention to the details of social concern but rather in its capacity to alter a person's basic motivation for living. Pride turns a person inward--toward himself and

³⁷The thirteen sermons form an adequate base from which to build Wesley's theological ethics. Of particular importance are the "beatitudes" as they indicate, in capsule form, the fundamental character of Christian existence. Cannon, after overviewing the role of the beatitudes in Wesley's thinking, concludes, "the Wesleyan ethics is, in the last analysis, an ethics of Christian self-realization; and as such it takes its place among those systems of moral discipline in which the Christian society is conceived in terms of its individual members, the quality of whose lives and the earnestness of whose work constitute its power and its success." Cannon, op. cit., p. 236.

his own desires. God's love, released in man's experience, by its very nature turns a man outward--toward others. Wesley had no theology of preaching as such, but if he had it would carry with it the idea that the preached Word is in fact a means of grace which, when received in faith, confirms existing faith and then expands its personal and social implications.³⁸ Therefore, it is a benefit both to the individual and society when one engages in the preaching task. The hoped-for result of preaching is changed lives; lives with such an experience of love that they cannot refrain from changing bad social conditions. Such a life-style corresponds to what Carter calls "vocation."³⁹

Thus, every sermon, to a greater or lesser extent, is a sermon concerned with Christian ethics. Wesley believes that God calls men to preach and even though gospel preaching is Christocentric and soteriological in nature, yet the test of the sermon is largely its ethical impact. It is disappointing to note that Doughty's chapter on "Some Effects of Wesley's Preaching" does not refer to changed moral conditions in some parts of England

³⁸Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p. 176f.

³⁹Henry Carter, The Methodist Heritage (New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), p. 188ff.

as a result of Methodist preaching and ministry.⁴⁰ Of course, such results are often difficult to measure and there are instances where pro-Wesleyan writers tend to exaggerate his significance.⁴¹ However, there is ample evidence at hand to suggest that as a matter of fact the Wesleyan movement did have great impact on English society and was responsible for much positive social change.⁴² In this light, Durant's statement is not too strong that Wesley was, barring Pitt, "the greatest Englishman of his times."⁴³

The sermon, for Wesley, dealt with obedience as well as commitment. It is probably correct to say that the sermon was the main source of inspiration that stimulated eighteenth century Methodists to social action. If Wesley's life itself is any indication of his thought, then the true gospel minister is to be concerned for the

⁴⁰Doughty, op. cit., pp. 128-35.

⁴¹For example see the observations of W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and His Century (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.), pp. 9-17 and A. Skevington Wood, The Burning Heart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 280ff.

⁴²For some idea of the impact of Methodism on English society see S. Paul Schilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective (New York: Abingdon, 1960), p. 61f.; Maldwyn Edwards, John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century (London: Epworth Press, 1955), p. 147ff. Francis J. McConnell, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon, 1939), pp. 233-310.

⁴³Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 137.

whole man and the fulfillment of his destiny in the context of grace. This involves, in Wesley's understanding, man's whole sphere of existence, personal and social.

Who is a Gospel Minister, in the full, scriptural sense of the word? He, and He alone, of whatever denomination, that does declare the whole counsel of God: that does preach the whole Gospel, even justification and sanctification, preparation for glory. He that does not put asunder what God has joined, but publishes alike, 'Christ dying for us, and Christ living in us.'⁴⁴

The sermons alone are sufficient to give us an adequate understanding of the Wesleyan ethic. Add to them Wesley's practical advice in his letters and tracts and one finds himself with a relatively large body of material. That Wesley expected the sermons to be the main bearers of his thoughts on the Christian life is indicated in the attention he gave to writing, editing, and publishing them, a care not evident in the tracts, for example.

THE NATURE OF THE WORLD

Among the chief obstacles confronting man's quest for meaning is the constant threat of the world. In his study of Wesley's Puritan heritage, Monk points up part of the problem faced by both the Puritans and Wesley concerning how Christian faith is related to the world.

⁴⁴Works, X, 456.

On the one hand, since the ultimate meaning and purpose in life for the Christian comes from relation to God, which produces his final salvation, and not, as in the case of the natural man, from the world, a primary concern for the Christian is the transfer of his interests and values from those of the world to those of God. Contamination by the world must be removed. On the other hand, man has been, in the providence of God, placed in a material world which is good if used for its proper purposes, that is, God's glorification. Man must of necessity, therefore, live in relation to the world and, in addition, be responsible for his use of it. This responsibility entails the all-important responsibility to and for his neighbor, both materially and spiritually.⁴⁵

Wesley's understanding of the threat of the world is related to his view of man's natural participation in evil. As we have seen, the natural man--and to some extent the legal man--is motivated by a deep-rooted self-love which gives one a false sense of security, peace, and happiness. Actually, for Wesley, this man reflects the image of evil rather than good.⁴⁶ Although the problem of sin continues, albeit in a lesser degree, in the justified man, yet his relation to Christ--and the church--excludes him from the ranks of the "world." By the "world" Wesley generally means those individuals "that are

⁴⁵Monk, op. cit., p. 227. Monk points up that Wesley places less stress on such things as "dress, plays, and the arts" and more on the quality of holiness in Christian life than the Puritans. Ibid., p. 230.

⁴⁶Wesley is convinced that the "devil" is ultimately responsible for the evil in the world. Sermons, II, 111.

not of God," that is, those who do not have an evangelical experience of faith resulting in the life of love.⁴⁷

Specifically the world is an active evil force which, when responded to favorably, tends to undercut any meaningful relationship between God (as Father) and man; or for that matter, man and man.

The power of the world lies in its ability to destroy potential or actual relationships between man and God and/or man and man. Wesley, therefore, sees the world as being energetic and purposive. Actually it is contrary to the design of God for man and actively attempts to thwart God's attempts to save man.⁴⁸ As such, it "hates" Christians and evidences this hatred in active persecution. In answering the question, "why are Christians so persecuted?" Wesley says,

The reason is plain: the spirit which is in the world is directly opposite to the Spirit which is of God. It must therefore needs be that those who are of the world will be opposite to those who are of God. There is the utmost contrariety between them, in all their opinions, their desires, designs, and tempers. . . . Therefore, were it only on this

⁴⁷Works, VI, 454.

⁴⁸The world tends to corrupt good men, thereby quenching their spiritual sensitivity. Cf. Works, VI, 458-9, 463, 468-9.

account, all the servants of the devil will persecute the children of God.⁴⁹

At times, this spirit of the world invades the church and successfully turns Christians against the cause of righteousness (as seen in the antagonists of the Methodist movement). Wesley always seems astounded that churchmen of the Church of England can be so antagonistic toward his views.

For Wesley, the "flood of unrighteousness and ungodliness" engulfing England is the result of the collective impact of personal sin.⁵⁰ That is, misery comes to all because men are sinners individually. In his sermon on "National Sins and Miseries" Wesley attempts to show that personal sins have effected the nation. There are many ways this collective evil manifests itself; for example, in politics,

If you saw, as I have seen, in every country, city, town, men who were once of a calm, mild, friendly, temper, mad with party-zeal, foaming with rage against their quiet neighbors, ready to tear out one another's bowels; if you had heard men, who once feared God and honored the

⁴⁹Sermons, I, 370; So it was in the early church, the more righteousness increased, the more the world was enraged. Sermons, I, 100.

⁵⁰Cf. Works, VII, 402, para. #5; compare with p. 405, para. #1 and p. 407, para #8. Prince has picked up something of this idea of collective evil as well. Cf. John W. Prince, Wesley on Religious Education (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1926), pp. 29-30.

king, now breathing out the bitterest invectives against him, and just ripe, should any occasion offer, for treason and rebellion; you would not then judge this to be a little evil, a matter of small moment, but one of the heaviest judgments which God can permit to fall upon a guilty land.⁵¹

The sermons give one the impression that Wesley, while often speaking of the country as a whole, tends to see this spirit of the world more in terms of urban centers than rural communities. Overall he tends to be less harsh with the rural setting where the density of population is less than in the cities. Principally, for this reason, Wesley located the Kingswood School in a rural setting rather than in the town. Wesley was even more generous with the so-called "heathen" who lived in non-industrialized countries. In his tract, "Thoughts on Slavery" (published in 1774), he bases part of the natives in their own country.⁵² It is rather surprising that Wesley maintained this view in light of his experience decades earlier with the American Indians.⁵³ The fact

⁵¹Works, VII, 403.

⁵²Works, XI, 60-65.

⁵³During the early part of the Georgia mission Wesley visualized the American Indian as unspoiled by civilization and, living close to nature, more eager to hear the gospel than the city dweller. On his return voyage to England he records his disillusionment in his Journal (I, 66f). On this subject, see Martin Schmidt, John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 132.

that Wesley retained the idea that the less civilization one has to cope with the less collective evil he has to live in tension with indicates that he would accept the idea that simplicity of culture is conducive to better human relations. Lawson may be correct in seeing in Wesley, especially in his view of Christian perfection, a type of monasticism although one "to be lived out in the home, the market, and the workshop."⁵⁴

It is to be expected that Wesley's view of eighteenth century English society would reflect his theological convictions regarding the nature of the world. Notwithstanding the admirable features of eighteenth century English culture, Wesley was appalled at the extent to which the people indulged themselves in evil, as he saw it. Although he admitted that English society was not as barbarous as other nations and times, yet he sees in the society's cultural advance new guises for various manifestations of evil. In his sermon "A Caution Against Bigotry" he says,

These monsters might almost make us overlook the works of the devil, that are wrought in our own country. But, alas! we cannot open our eyes even here, without seeing them on every side. Is

⁵⁴John Lawson, Comprehensive Handbook of Christian Doctrine (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 232.

it a small proof of his power, that common swearers, drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers, thieves, robbers, sodomites, murderers, are still found in every part of our land? How triumphant does the prince of this world reign in all these children of disobedience?⁵⁵

The greatest evil in English society, for Wesley, revolves around the improper use of money. Instead of being a blessing, riches⁵⁶ are usually a snare, dividing men into classes of rich and poor, a division which threatens the very life of the church.⁵⁷ Wesley sees Methodist thrift, originally a matter of self-discipline, as a possible threat in that it might tend to lead men away from God, thereby shifting their attention from God to money. For Wesley, the Christian is to see himself as a "steward;" one to whom God has entrusted a body, a soul,

⁵⁵Sermons, II, 111. For additional, and more detailed, comments on English society see Sermons II, 483f.; Sermons, I, 102ff.; Works, VII, 400-9.

⁵⁶Riches are defined by Wesley as having more than "the plain necessities, or at most conveniences of life." Cf. "The Danger of Riches," Works, VII, 3. For additional references to Wesley's concern for wealth, though by no means exhaustive, see "The Use of Money," Works, VI, 124ff.; "On Riches," Works, VII, 214ff.; "On Worldly Folly," Works, VII, 305f.; "On the Danger of Increasing Riches," Works, II, 355f. For additional reference on the poor and rich, see "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VIII," Sermons, I, 482f.; "National Sins and Miseries," Works, VII, 406-7; "The Rich Man and Lazarus," Works, VII, 244f., et. al.

⁵⁷For example, see Wesley's sermon on "The Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," (Works, VII, 282ff.) where much blame is laid at the misuse of money.

a portion of worldly goods (especially money), and several talents.⁵⁸ The wrong use of money is a breach of stewardship and is, therefore, a personal and social evil. Commenting on Wesley's sermon, "The Use of Money," Rattenbury says, "no one could possibly read it without realizing that Wesley was against the dehumanizing conditions of labour to which he evidently was quite sensitive during the early years of the Industrial Revolution."⁵⁹

The sermons indicate, as McConnell suggests was true of Wesley's general view, that "Wesley's thought of the redemption of society by economic means was conceived in terms of the individual's use of money to help his fellow men. . . ."⁶⁰ McConnell later criticizes this individualism in Wesley by suggesting that Wesley believes that personal commitment to God will eventually result in the automatic clearing up of social problems, such as the problem of wealth, and that such a view is unrealistic.⁶¹ On the other hand, MacArthur sees Wesley's individualism as "a standing protest against the social effects of the

⁵⁸Works, VI, 137-9.

⁵⁹Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 232; cf. p. 233f.

⁶⁰McConnell, op. cit., p. 249.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 266.

industrial system and the Poor Law," notwithstanding Wesley's lack of preaching against specific social evils.⁶² She further suggests that we have not yet (as of 1936) taken Wesley's method seriously!⁶³ Rattenbury is correct, of course, in stating that Wesley is primarily an evangelist, not a political economist. Yet he is equally correct in observing that Wesley's evangelical task incorporated a social dimension, one which Rattenbury suggests laid the moral foundation for specific social reforms under the leadership of men like Wilberforce and Shaftesbury.⁶⁴

In the sermons this spirit of the world is seen, among other things, in dress standards,⁶⁵ ruthless competition in business,⁶⁶ the unrestrained consumption of

⁶²Kathleen Walker MacArthur, The Economic Ethics of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon Press, 1936), p. 80.

⁶³Ibid., p. 81. For a brief treatment of Wesley's "chief documents" on social issues not contained in the sermons from this author's point of view, see p. 103ff.

⁶⁴Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 235; Marlowe states that the Anglican "Evangelicals" involved themselves more in social work than did the Methodists. Cf. Marlowe, op. cit., p. 47f.

⁶⁵"On Dress," Works, VII, 15ff. Wesley once called "fashion" the "tyrant of fools." Works, VII, 116.

⁶⁶Sermons, II, 317.

alcoholic beverages,⁶⁷ Sabbath-breaking,⁶⁸ gambling,⁶⁹ evil-speaking⁷⁰ (including swearing and lying⁷¹), horse-racing,⁷² and the major evils of war⁷³ and slavery.⁷⁴

Oddly enough Wesley has little to say in the sermons, or anywhere for that matter, on matters pertaining to sexual morality.⁷⁵ He is more concerned with overeating in the sermons than sexual exploitation.⁷⁶ Only brief mention is made in the sermons of his aversion to prostitution⁷⁷ and adultery.⁷⁸ In his sermon "On Leaving the World" he

⁶⁷Sermons, II, 317-18; especially on Sundays, Sermons, II, 486.

⁶⁸Sermons, II, 486-7.

⁶⁹Sermons, II, 487; Works, VII, 504-5.

⁷⁰"The Cure of Evil-Speaking," Sermons, II, 296f.

⁷¹Works, VII, 406; Works VII, 505.

⁷²Works, VII, 504.

⁷³Works, VII, 340-1.

⁷⁴Works, VI, 345.

⁷⁵For a general overview of eighteenth century English morality, see Durant, op. cit., p. 63ff.

⁷⁶Sermons, I, 397; especially "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VII," Sermons, I, 448ff; Works, VII, 6; Sermons, II, 320-21.

⁷⁷Sermons, II, 487.

⁷⁸Works, VII, 80.

cautions Christians against over-familiarity with non-believing women, leaving the results of such entanglements to the imagination of the hearers.⁷⁹ The general experience of Wesley with women was limited at best and his own tragic marital life might have tended to temper any desire to offer ready advice on the general subject of sex.⁸⁰ However, it may also be that matters of a sexual nature were of little, if any, interest to Wesley.⁸¹

The Christian life is in a very real sense at war with such worldly elements of evil (as the "devil," the general atmosphere of evil, and particularly "wicked" men),

⁷⁹Works, VI, 471.

⁸⁰Cf. McConnell's statement on Wesley's contact with women. McConnell, op. cit., p. 219f. Fitchett, commenting on Wesley's tract, "Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life" (1743), states that Wesley views celibacy as a "loftier state" than marriage. Fitchett, op. cit., p. 442 (cf. Sugden's comments on Wesley's view of marriage in Sermons, I, 357n.).

⁸¹Michalson's comment, "when young people fall in love, [Wesley] insinuates that the Holy Spirit has left them," is totally unfounded. Michalson was referring to a journal entry dated June 12, 1774. The entry is concerned with Wesley's observations as to why a particular society had declined in its evangelistic spirit. With this context in mind, one of Wesley's conclusions was as follows: "3. Most of the liveliest in the society were the single men and women; and several of these in a little time contracted an inordinate affection for each other; whereby they so grieved the Holy Spirit of God, that he in great measure departed from them." Cf. Michalson, op. cit., p. 153; Journal, IV, 18. Emphasis mine.

as Wesley challenges his hearers in his sermon "The Witness of Our Own Spirit."⁸² Christians are not to be "conformed to this world," that is, to trust it for happiness, to love it for its own sake, to resemble the world (accept its value structure), or in any way to obey the world.⁸³ Such conformity is to serve Mammon, not God! Therefore, the Christian is not to form pacts of friendship with non-believers. By "friendship" here Wesley means a "close attachment to any of them that know not God."⁸⁴ Above all, the Christian is to avoid marriage with unbelievers.⁸⁵

Sugden cautions his readers not to take Wesley's comments on English society without some qualifications. He suggests that Wesley was as susceptible to exaggeration as any social reformer.⁸⁶ On occasion this does seem to be the case. It appears at times that Wesley is driven to a type of asceticism in trying to escape the evils of the

⁸²Sermons, I, 236.

⁸³By "obeying the world" Wesley means conformity to the ease, pleasures, and fashion of non-believers (cf. Sermons, I, 501). He does not refer here to the political world. Wesley's political conservatism as a Tory led him to view the role of government in some sort of social relationship to God (Sermons, II, 492-93).

⁸⁴Works, VI, 456.

⁸⁵Works, VI, 456, 466-7.

⁸⁶Sermons, II, 111n.

world. For example, in his sermon "On Leaving the World" Wesley says,

Entering now, as it were, into a new world (as a Fellow of Lincoln College), I resolve to have no acquaintance by chance, but by choice; and to choose such only as I had reason to believe would help me to heaven. . . . I bless God, this has been my invariable rule for about threescore years. . . . I earnestly advise all of you . . . to adopt the same plan. . . .⁸⁷

Wesley's view of "friendship" with the world in this sermon is seen in terms of either evangelism or commercialism.⁸⁸

However, it is difficult to judge Wesley too quickly as being extremely harsh in his view of society when the historical conditions of the time are considered, particularly as concerns the state of the church.⁸⁹

Dorothy Marshall in Eighteenth Century England paints a cautious but vivid picture of the lot of the common man, the man Wesley knew best. She suggests that the general lack of a moral code was one of the most serious defects

⁸⁷Sermons, II, 473.

⁸⁸Sermons, II, 456, 466.

⁸⁹A detailed study of English society is unnecessary due to the many works available on the subject. For example, cf. Whiteley, op. cit., esp. pp. 74-168, 202-39, 295-330; A. S. Turberville, English Men and Women in the 18th Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), esp. pp. 71-171, 287-318.

of the masses. Commenting on the conditions of the times, she says,

. . . in town and country alike conditions made it difficult for the mass of the people to live by any strict moral code. Overcrowding made every kind of sexual laxity almost normal. Extreme poverty made thieving and bullying the only alternatives to starvation. Over-crowding, poverty, and ill-health together with monotonous food and over-long hours of work, often found compensation in drunkenness, in a love of brutal sports, and in a violence that broke out again and again when the pressure became too great. It was a hard, harsh world for the mass of English people, and one singularly devoid of pity. Disease, violence, early or sudden death were too common. Men were hanged for food rioting: children were hanged for petty thefts. The old proverb that one might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb was bitterly true.⁹⁰

The importance of Marshall's observations on Wesley's times is her conclusion that the discipline needed to correct existent evils could not be imposed from without by the courts.⁹¹ Simon implies the same thing, that is, that the "law courts" were not able to arrest the tide of immorality flooding the country.⁹² Likewise, Simon would tend to agree with Marshall that the "impact" of Wesley lay in his concern, "as a by-product of the business of saving souls," for a solution to the ills

⁹⁰Dorothy Marshall, Eighteenth Century England (New York: McKay, 1962), p. 243.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 143-4.

⁹²Simon, John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism, p. 133.

of society through an inner self-discipline.⁹³ These statements underscore what seems to have been Wesley's approach, for example, attempting through preaching and the class meeting to help man realize an inner dynamic which had the power to alter his outward situation. Wesley's concern was with an inner law of holiness regulating all the actions, not additional legislative acts to be enforced. The spirit of the world can only be overcome by the dynamic of the Spirit of God in the lives of His people.

The sermons suggest that Wesley views society as a negative force, shaping the values of its members which all the while tend to lead people away from God. As we have indicated, his optimism concerning the possibilities of grace for man (and his resulting social concern) did not cause him to underestimate the power of collective forces that more often than not work contrary to God's redemptive purposes. The sermons are filled with warnings addressed to the Christian to separate himself from the world. Hence, redeemed man is called out of social intercourse with society in general (this void being filled by the "society"), but challenged to return to it "to do it good."⁹⁴ To do the world "good," however, requires no

⁹³Marshall, op. cit., p. 244.

⁹⁴Works, VI, 456, 466, 471.

entangling alliances or compromises with its ways or wishes. In fact, perhaps the greatest contribution the Christian can make is to stand squarely in opposition to the evil forces of the world. While it is true, in one sense, that Wesley calls the believer out of the world; it is likewise true for him that authentic faith will not allow the believer to abandon the world altogether.

THE NATURE OF GOOD WORKS

Speaking of the Christian life, Wesley says, "by bearing fruit, and by this alone, it attains the highest perfection it is capable of, and answers the end for which it was planted. Who, what is he then, that is called a Christian, and can speak lightly of good works?"⁹⁵ Such good works are themselves never the ground of justification in the sense that they merit God's grace,⁹⁶ neither can they ever be considered as works of supererogation.⁹⁷ They are the proper way, however, that sincerity of faith is manifested.⁹⁸ Therefore, they cannot be omitted in the Christian's life.⁹⁹ When good works spring from the right

⁹⁵Works, VII, 131.

⁹⁶Sermons, II, 26f.

⁹⁷Works, VI, 148.

⁹⁸Sermons, I, 277f.

⁹⁹Works, VII, 131.

principle--the right intention--they are the "perfection of religion." While there are various degrees of good works,¹⁰⁰ yet any genuinely good work suggests the work of God.

For Wesley, man's natural condition is such that he cannot properly do good works. He is much like those men who lived before the flood whose hearts were "evil continually" and whose works, consequently, sprang from a wrong intention.¹⁰¹ Even with the aid of prevenient grace, man cannot live so that his life will produce "good works," that is, "in the Christian sense." In his sermon, "Justification by Faith" Wesley states that good works follow justification, never precede it.

Perhaps those who doubt this have not clearly considered the weighty reason which is here assigned, why no works done before justification can be truly and properly good. The argument plainly runs thus:--

No works are good, which are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done:

But no works done before justification are done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done:

Therefore, no works done before justification are good.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰As, for example, the works of Jesus pertaining to feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, et cetera; all of which were lower kinds of good works. Sermons, I, 97.

¹⁰¹Sermons, II, 214.

¹⁰²Works, V, 59-60.

Good works, which have another person as a referent, are duties to be performed by the believer.¹⁰³ Yet good works (which are really Christian social acts) are acts born out of faith and love.¹⁰⁴ There is a sense, too, in which good acts are representative of one's service to Christ. In fact, it is possible for Wesley to see the other as a Christ-figure in that what is done in another's behalf is actually done to Christ Himself.¹⁰⁵

Wesley's theology of good works finds its clearest expression in the sermon "On Visiting the Sick." He begins by dividing the concept of Good works into two categories. The first consists of "works of piety," which are "hearing and reading the Scripture, receiving the Lord's Supper, public and private prayer, and fasting."¹⁰⁶ By and large this category of good works relates to the personal improvement of one's individual spiritual sensitivity.¹⁰⁷

Although Wesley does not develop this aspect of good works to any length in this particular sermon, he

¹⁰³Works, VII, 123.

¹⁰⁴Sermons, I, 150.

¹⁰⁵Sermons, I, 366; Works, VII, 14.

¹⁰⁶Works, VII, 117.

¹⁰⁷Works, VII, 5-7, 10-11.

does so in "The Danger of Riches." In this second sermon, as the title suggests, Wesley is concerned with the threat of riches to faith. To counteract the possible negative impact of wealth on Christian character, Wesley strongly emphasizes the strengthening of the inner life through works of piety. The tone of the sermon often seems legalistic even though he is dealing with the intention of man rather than his actual performance. Consequently the sermon is heavy on judgment and is in places devastating in attempting to strip away the pretensions of man to righteousness.¹⁰⁸

The sermon, "The Danger of Riches," is aimed at rich and poor alike; that is, Wesley contends that it is futile to seek wealth as an end in itself if happiness is one's ultimate goal. Wesley's warning to the Methodist Societies indicates that concern for wealth was becoming a problem to them.¹⁰⁹ Riches, or the desire for them, according to Wesley, have quenched much of the spiritual sensitivity of the Methodist people.

¹⁰⁸ Works of piety are necessary to faith (Sermons, II, 453-4) and must be coupled with "charity" to be of value to the individual (Sermons, I, 340).

¹⁰⁹ Sermons, I, 10. Wesley notes the length of his ministry to the time of this sermon as being forty years.

You are so deeply hurt, that you have nigh lost your zeal for works of mercy, as well as of piety. You once pushed on, through cold or rain, or whatever cross lay in your way, to see the poor, the sick, the distressed. You went about doing good, and found out those who were not able to find you. . . . But which of you now has that compassion for the ignorant, and for them that are out of the way? . . . You have something else to do.¹¹⁰

To counter this desire Wesley suggests that the people cultivate a desire for God which, in turn, becomes the measure of one's values.

Again, as the sermon "On Visiting the Sick" indicates, such service as attention to the sick is beneficial to humanity and when done in faith falls in the category of works of mercy. It is this aspect of good works that receives the greatest amount of attention in this sermon. Wesley says works of mercy are a means of grace and, therefore, are sacramental in nature. So, to neglect the performance of this duty of good works results in a loss of grace to the soul.¹¹¹

If you do not [fulfill your duty], you lose a means of grace; you lose an excellent means of increasing your thankfulness to God, who saves you from this pain and sickness, and continues your health and strength; as well as of increasing your sympathy with the afflicted, your benevolence, and all social affections.¹¹²

¹¹⁰Sermons, I, 14.

¹¹¹Such works are necessary to sanctification. Cf. Sermons, II, 454.

¹¹²Works, VII, 119; cf. p. 117.

The doing of works of mercy is thereby linked directly by Wesley to the possibility of inheriting eternal life or its opposite, "everlasting fire."¹¹³ None is too young or too poor to fulfill this aspect of Christian commitment. However, the rich have a special trust given them with greater opportunities--and greater responsibilities--for doing good.

Wesley's sacramental view of good works attempts, in good Anglican fashion, to bridge the gap between the Protestant tradition's lack of emphasis on works after justification and the Roman Catholic tradition's lack of emphasis on justification by faith.¹¹⁴ Wesley's sermon, "On Predestination," attempts to set forth the idea that man is in a real sense responsible for his own condemnation if he fails to repent.¹¹⁵ This emphasis is in opposition to the Moravian concept of "stillness" which says that man can do nothing toward the accomplishment of his own salvation. The harm of the concept of predestination, according to Wesley, is that it tends to quench

¹¹³Works, VII, 123.

¹¹⁴For an informative treatment of this struggle in Wesley's thought, see Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), pp. 161-73; cf. Cannon, op. cit., p. 147f.; Rattenbury, op. cit., p. 170f.

¹¹⁵Cf. Works, VI, 225f.

any drive toward personal holiness with its teaching on the "decrees" of God. Thus, Wesley sees the Calvinian concept of predestination as a hinderance to vital faith.¹¹⁶

Works of mercy, for Wesley, may be further divided into two classes: physical mercy and spiritual mercy. Physical mercy pertains to the doing good to the bodies of other men and is not to be neglected. At the same time, underlying this relief of the physical problems of mankind is the motif of spiritual mercy. Wesley urges his listeners,

While you are eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, a husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless, see that you still keep a higher end in view, even in the saving of souls from death, and that you labour to make all you say and do subservient to that great end.¹¹⁷

This same sentiment is echoed in "The Reward of the Righteous,"¹¹⁸ and can properly be said to be the fundamental concern of Wesley's preaching, for example, the redemption of men.¹¹⁹ This is not to depreciate his interest in social concern. His understanding of the

¹¹⁶Works, VII, 378f.

¹¹⁷Works, VII, 124.

¹¹⁸Works, VII, 130.

¹¹⁹Note similar conclusions by Edwards, op. cit., p. 147; cf. McConnell, op. cit., p. 233ff.

sacramental nature of good works precludes that possibility. It is to say, however, that works of piety are the necessary ground of works of mercy, which are in turn the necessary evidence of authentic personal faith.

Probably the strength of Wesley's view of good works lies in his ability to view man as a responsible co-operating agent with God for the salvation of the world. Man's responsible action, while stemming from divine grace, never individual ability, has a sacramental nature, thereby intensifying the need for it. Wesley's view of good works and their relation to Christian faith serves to point up his basic social concern. Active Christian faith carries its own possibility of immediate strength for the performance of the task at hand as well as the eventual reward for such obedient service. In all this, though, good works are never done for themselves, but in loving response to God. Good works are the logical reaction of a life of love.

ADVICE ON ETHICAL BEHAVIOR

As mentioned in the introduction to this study,¹²⁰ the sermons indicate that Wesley would hesitate to discuss

¹²⁰Cf. p. 12.

personal ethics as opposed to social ethics.¹²¹ What man is in his heart, in Wesley's opinion, will generally be evident somewhere in his relations with others. If a man is evil then he tends to use the other for his own well-being. Such is the pull of pride. On the other hand, however, if a man's heart is filled with God's love then he will in turn give evidence of it in his relation to others. Such is the force of love. Even though Wesley speaks of works of piety (primarily personal) and works of mercy (primarily social), the Christian response to life is viewed as a unit with each sphere of responsibility being intimately interrelated to the other.

An excellent example of this is found in Wesley's sermon, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse I." In this sermon Wesley says "poverty of spirit" implies "a just sense of our inward and outward sins, and of our guilt and helplessness."¹²² It is when a non-believer realizes his own poverty of spirit that he can begin to walk in the Christian way. Once he becomes a believer, by faith, then he still has a sense of poverty of spirit, albeit in a different sense than before;

¹²¹Cf. the introduction of Wesley's sermon, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse VII." Sermons, I, 449-50.

¹²²Sermons, I, 325.

namely, the having "a continual sense of our total dependence on Him, for every good thought, or word, or work. . . ." ¹²³ Therefore, man's trust in God presupposes a condition of continual dependence on Him for the ability to experience an increase of grace and responsibility. For Wesley a disciplined life helps man to develop this sense of dependency.

The same principle is true for "mourning." ¹²⁴ On the one hand, "mourning" refers to the Christian's inner awareness of his own (original) sin and the need for the fullness of love (Christian perfection). When holiness of life, as an ideal, is partially realized by faith in one's experience then he is "comforted." The Christian continues to mourn--even in this high state of spiritual life--but the object of mourning is different. No longer concerned with his own lack of holiness (not in the sense of having attained all, but in the sense of "attaining"), the believer mourns over the condition of the world around him. The implication is, of course, that even this mourning will be "comforted" as men turn to God and social conditions improve.

It is possible to subsume Wesley's general

¹²³Sermons, I, 328.

¹²⁴Sermons, I, 332f.

preaching on the ethical life under three topics: (1) the need for complete trust in God, (2) the life of discipline, and (3) the doing good to all men. First of all, for Wesley, personal spiritual sensitivity and the development of individual ethical standards, like the beginnings of the Christian life, is controlled by one's absolute trust in God. Wesley everywhere assumes that God always works in the best interest of man and therefore never lays more responsibilities and obligations on man than divine grace will enable him to handle.¹²⁵

This absolute trust in God is the proper foundation from which spring the "two branches of religion," for example, our duty to God and our duty to man. With such trust man can avoid needless speculation as to why certain acts are considered ethical in the Bible and others are not.¹²⁶ And, trust in God releases the divine power necessary to undertake one's ethical obligations, regardless of how distasteful they may be at times.¹²⁷ Personal spiritual commitment and, hence, works of piety precede in the natural order of things man's relation to man. The important point is that commitment to God is at the heart

¹²⁵Sermons, I, 277.

¹²⁶Sermons, I, 275.

¹²⁷Works, VII, 148f.

of true morality.¹²⁸ "We know," says Wesley, "that as all nature, so all religion, and all happiness, depend on him; and we know that whoever teach to seek hapiness without him are monsters, and the pests of society."¹²⁹

Man's trust in God not only allows him to be strengthened from within by the obvious works of piety, but also by the inconveniences of life, as in suffering. Wesley says that all our passive graces are built on the reality of suffering. That is,

. . . it is by sufferings that our faith is tried, and, therefore, made more acceptable to God. It is in the day of trouble that we have occasion to say, 'though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' And this is well pleasing to God, that we should own him in the face of danger; in defiance of sorrow, sickness, pain, or death.¹³⁰

Such victory in the face of suffering sharpens man's ability to deal with moral and natural evil in the world since the passive graces (patience, meekness, gentleness, longsuffering) "have evil for their object."¹³¹ Consequently, the more these graces are "exercised," the more one's personal happiness on earth is enhanced.

Personally Wesley could resign himself to physical

¹²⁸Works, VI, 276-7.

¹²⁹Works, VII, 271.

¹³⁰Works, VI, 236.

¹³¹Works, VI, 236.

suffering although his intense interest in medicine and the publication of his Primitive Physic indicate his refusal to allow pain to remain unnecessarily. But especially dramatic was Wesley's resignation to the violent persecution of the mobs. For years Wesley would not allow his followers to take persecutors to court for their conduct although the Act of Toleration (1689) and the Riot Act (1715) forbade such conduct as was often carried out against the Methodists. Although Wesley did consider the possibility of using the courts as a means of redress in his later ministry, it was only as a last resort to secure peace for Methodist preaching. The best policy was to avoid this form of evil, if possible, and, if not, to bear it with patience and love.¹³²

Secondly, Wesley expects Christians to live disciplined lives. The increase of personal piety is not an automatic process for Wesley, but one of hard work and obedience. We have already pointed out that Wesley's insistence on the life of good works is not a form of works-righteousness. On the other hand it is evident that he in no way advocates a form of "cheap grace." The disciplined life, as he sees it, includes the utilization of all Biblical means of increasing spiritual sensitivity, such

¹³²Sermons, I, 373.

as prayer,¹³³ fasting,¹³⁴ and receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.¹³⁵ In addition to the more obvious "means of grace," Wesley urges frugality in matters pertaining to sleep, work responsibilities, social relationships, and matters related to entertainment.¹³⁶ This is to say that the increase of one's spiritual sensitivity depends on one's total reaction to life situations, personal and social. No area of personal concern or involvement is exempt from some connection with God and the life of love.¹³⁷ Wesley could not speak of any human activity as having absolutely no bearing on authentic faith.¹³⁸

To live a disciplined life means to avoid personal contact with any form of evil since one's spiritual life may be hindered by it, if not quenched entirely. For example, material goods, especially money tend to lessen

¹³³Sermons, I, 428-31.

¹³⁴Sermons, I, 455-63.

¹³⁵Works, VII, 507-8.

¹³⁶Works, VII, 29f.

¹³⁷Cf. Wesley's letter to Mr. S. (April 24, 1769) with its advice on personal ethics. Letters, V, 132f.

¹³⁸Nagler suggests that, like Pietism, Wesley tended to neglect those areas of life that did not have a direct bearing on religious subjects, such as the arts, sciences, philosophy, etc. Arthur Wilford Nagler, Pietism and Methodism (Nashville: M.E. Church, South, 1918), p. 178.

the believer's dependence on God and dominate his life instead, and to the extent they succeed, man's spiritual life is diminished.¹³⁹ Holding a view of the inherent forcefulness of evil Wesley suggests that when "children" inherit money, it may be a curse rather than a blessing.¹⁴⁰ This concern for discipline was also in evidence in Wesley's "societies."¹⁴¹ The role of the class leader and "The General Rules" was to increase the holiness of the individual members through a disciplined faith. In order to maintain this sense of discipline--at times almost regimentation--Wesley often purged the societies.

Wesley is explicit, however, in showing how the Christian is to counter the many temptations he will face. The answer revolves around having a "single eye" to the glory of God in all that is done and actually seek for personal holiness. Among other things, the being made perfect in love means that the believer actually seeks to do the will of God on earth.¹⁴² Wesley says, "the will of

¹³⁹Man cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time, says Wesley. Cf. Sermons, I, 500f.

¹⁴⁰Cf. "The Use of Money," Sermons, II, 322-3.

¹⁴¹Cf. Leslie F. Church, The Early Methodist People (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 162-3, 192-3. Lee suggests that Wesley's Christian Library reflects the devotional interests of Wesley. Cf. Lee, op. cit., pp. 225-8.

¹⁴²Sermons, II, 193.

God is the supreme, unalterable rule for every intelligent creature; equally binding every angel in heaven, and every man upon earth."¹⁴³ This total absorption with doing God's will (which is the making men holy) by the power of love can effectively counteract the attempts of evil to conquer the soul. It also serves as a base for relationships with the "world," since doing the will of God has many social implications.

Avoiding evil by the doing of God's will means to place a premium on the present moment.

Improve the present moment. Buy up every opportunity of growing in grace, or of being good. Let not the thought of receiving more grace tomorrow, make you negligent of today. . . . Whatever may be tomorrow, give all diligence today to 'add to your faith courage, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness,' and the fear of God, till you attain that pure and perfect love.¹⁴⁴

Wesley's third major concern is that Christians are

¹⁴³Therefore, because God loves man with such an intense love, man can have confidence that God's will as revealed in the Bible is trustworthy and to be obeyed. While Wesley does give "reason" and "experience" a definite role in the formation of one's ethical standards, the ultimate authority is the Scriptures. In the sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart" Wesley severely criticizes the use of any other authority for ethical behavior than trust in God's will as revealed in the Bible. Cf. Sermons, II, 275-6. Cf. Sugden's footnote on paragraph 3 (p. 275) for his disagreement with Wesley's easy dismissal of philosophical ethics.

¹⁴⁴Sermons, II, 203-4; I, 503, 509-10.

always to seek the good of other men; that is, treat all men as they would treat Christ Himself.¹⁴⁵ Generally speaking, however, Wesley seems content to dwell on the attitudes of Christian service more than the specifics of that service, especially in the sermons. Doughty is correct in saying that much of Wesley's ethical preaching was directed toward the believer and "would have evoked little, if any, response from a spiritually unawakened crowd and would almost certainly have invited derision from some."¹⁴⁶ The essence of the ethical life is found in the changed attitude or intention of the true Christian.¹⁴⁷ Then and only then can the "golden rule of mercy" be obeyed, for example, to do to others as we would have them do to us. "And this, rightly understood," says Wesley, "comprises the whole of that religion which our Lord came to establish upon earth."¹⁴⁸

In 1763, Wesley preached his sermon "The Reformation

¹⁴⁵Works, VII, 14.

¹⁴⁶Doughty, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁴⁷Specific ethical issues which interested Methodist people are listed by Church as being sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, smuggling, dress, the use of time, the theater, playing cards, and dancing. Cf. Church, op. cit., pp. 191-215. Doughty lists the areas of ethical concern for Wesley as being health, dress, marriage, family relations, money, smuggling, and temperance. Cf. Doughty, op. cit., pp. 89-99.

¹⁴⁸Sermons, I, 530.

of Manners" before the Society for the Reformation of Manners.¹⁴⁹ As would be expected, the sermon attempts to enlist the sympathetic aid of the listener in the work of the Society. After dealing briefly with the history and general work of the Society Wesley talks in terms of the necessary ingredients for social change. At the outset he places the burden for reformation on Christians and--typical of his view of the scheme of things--encourages them by saying that "unspeakable good" can be accomplished if they will be men of faith, courage, patience, and steadfastness.

In this sermon it is clear that love dictates a concern for the neighbor and love enables the Christian to carry through with his social task. In fact, the quality of love in Christian experience makes such labor "sweet," since it is done for God's honor. "Nothing is to be spoke or done," says Wesley, "either great or small, with a view to . . . the praise of men. But the intention, the eye of the mind, is always to be fixed on the glory of God and the good of man."¹⁵⁰ Thus, the Christian reformer approaches his task with a spirit of meekness, prudence, and seriousness.

¹⁴⁹Sermons, II, 481-505.

¹⁵⁰Sermons, II, 499.

Wesley's concluding remarks in the sermon consist of five points of advice on social reform. First, seriously consider the nature of this work (in general the work of Christian social service, in particular the Society for the Reformation of Manners). Second, be sure your motive for service is right. Third, do everything in a right temper. Earlier Wesley had urged the hearer to let his outward actions reflect his inner attitude, which is essentially "meekness." Fourth, always act and speak with seriousness and innocence. Fifth, do not hinder this particular society. Aid it!

The general feeling tone of this advice is also found in Wesley's sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse X."¹⁵¹ The aim of this sermon is to discuss outward hinderances to true holiness or what Wesley calls in the conclusion "pure and genuine morality." Wesley discusses four possible hinderances which are in actuality practical hints on how to assume one's ethical responsibility. This advice is: (1) do not judge others; (2) be cautious in aiding others; (3) do not neglect prayer; (4) be "at charity" with all men. This advice, if followed, will enable us, Wesley says, to live within the demands of the golden rule of mercy.

¹⁵¹Sermons, I, 517-31.

Now, then, let us walk by the same rule: let us do unto all as we would they should do to us. Let us love and honour all men. Let justice, mercy, and truth govern all our minds and actions. Let our superfluities give way to our neighbor's convenience . . . our conveniences, to our neighbor's necessities; our necessities, to his extremities.¹⁵²

The crux of the matter of Christian obedience is right at this point of self-denial. While self-denial is basically an individual matter, yet for Wesley it has social overtones. In his sermon on "Self-Denial" he links one's understanding of self-denial directly to social involvement.¹⁵³ Wesley contends that the man who will not deny himself will not perform works of mercy. The obvious implication is that Christian service requires more than mere momentary involvement. This suggestion follows Wesley's characterization of the Christian as a "steward" of God's gifts, particularly with respect to mercy.¹⁵⁴ That is, we voluntarily deny ourselves in order to share with others.

The social implications of self-denial are further indicated in the sermon "The Cure of Evil-Speaking." Evil speaking, to Wesley, is "neither more nor less than

¹⁵²Sermons, I, 531.

¹⁵³Works, VI, 111-2.

¹⁵⁴Sermons, II, 324.

speaking evil of an absent person; relating something evil, which was really done or said by one that is not present when it is related."¹⁵⁵ To refrain from this practice is another form of self-denial;¹⁵⁶ the practice of which would "convince the world and prepare them for (God's) Kingdom."¹⁵⁷ The social implications seem fairly obvious; namely, Christian obedience--by aiming at the good of other men--seeks in every possible way to life the other man to a sense of personal well-being. If this could be effected, social ills like slavery would soon be abolished.

As mentioned above, Wesley expected that the particulars of Christian ethics would be worked out in the societies as the members followed the "General Rules." These "rules" were divided into three categories: (1) the particulars of doing "no harm," by avoiding evil of every kind; (2) the particulars of "doing good [that is] . . . doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men"; (3) the particulars of bearing witness to their desire for salvation by "attending all the ordinances of God."¹⁵⁸ In addition, there were Wesley's

¹⁵⁵Sermons, II, 297.

¹⁵⁶Sermons, II, 307.

¹⁵⁷Sermons, II, 308.

¹⁵⁸See Appendix B, p. 224 for the "General Rules."

tracts on slavery, dress, marriage, drunkenness, smuggling, et cetera, which offered guidance on controversial matters. The sermons give evidence of Wesley's primary concern for social betterment and Christian ethics, which is the establishment of an inner law of divine love in the soul which acts as a frame of reference for scriptural Christian living in all its relations, individual and social.

CONCLUSION

Although Wesley's sermons are aimed at individual decision-making, still they have strong and clear social implications. As the gospel is preached, lives are changed and the community is changed. It is apparent that Wesley sees the conversion of society as an after-effect of the conversion of the individual. So, there is a direct relation between preaching and social change, for example, through the individual. Since God's power and love are absolute essentials to correct living and as these principles are incorporated into one's life by faith then whatever means can be used to introduce men to God are ultimately means of social reform. In Wesley's thinking, the preaching task and the discipline of the society combine to alter effectively both the individual and his culture.

It is clear, however, that the sermons were designed to deal specifically with issues of personal moral concern, although he constantly attempts to show the social relevance of his subjects. As concerns the larger social issues of his day, Wesley speaks to them in the tracts and the local society meetings. The importance of the sermons lies in the fact that Wesley is concerned with helping the Christian devise a style of life that can be carried into every situation, and the sermons also attempt to introduce the hearers to this style of life. Admittedly, Wesley's expectations regarding human conduct often sound legalistic, but the sharpness of some of his statements must be understood in relation to the social climate of his times.

As concerns ethical conduct the sermons attempt to spell out the details of the Christian's relation to his environment (the "world"). The "world," as an active evil force, is no friend to vital religion. This means that extreme caution must be exercised if the Christian's witness is not to be blunted. Wesley preaches a separatism from the world, but only in the context that the world itself is the arena within which the gospel exercises its power. Generally, Wesley's view of "friendship" with the world is weak. Yet that the world can be changed is axiomatic in terms of Wesley's view of Christian

perfection.

The sermons are a constant reminder of Wesley's insistence that vital faith must act itself out in good works. Wesley does have a theology of good works, although he is more interested in expressing their necessity rather than defining their nature. They are sacramental, however, when done in faith and can impart grace to the believer. Wesley's concept of good works amplifies the role of man in his theology. Good works are done in the strength of God's enabling power but only with the free consent of man. Thus, there is a relationship of cooperation between God and man that finds its clearest expression in good works.

In a study of the sermons it is possible to find many different types of advice given by Wesley on matters of personal and social ethical behavior. Notwithstanding their variety, it is possible to note three broad areas of thought in Wesley's teaching: (1) the need for complete trust in God; (2) the disciplined life; and (3) the necessity of doing whatever good you can to all men. These motifs catch the spirit of Wesley's ethical concern and emphasize its distinctive Christian character, the seriousness and singleness of heart which is necessary for Christian ethics, and the universal character of the obedient life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

American Methodism has tended at times to reflect Wesley's optimism concerning the possibilities of grace for man. Two eras when Wesley's emphasis was especially apparent were the camp meeting era (1801-1837)--with the itinerant preacher--and the social gospel era (1875-1917). Generally speaking it can be said that during the period of the camp meetings the concepts of free grace and holiness were emphasized,¹ while during the period of the social gospel the emphasis was on social concern;² both of

¹Cf. William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), p. 219. Note Asbury's enthusiasm for the subject of Christian perfection and its relation to the camp meeting. Cf. Francis Asbury, The Journal and Letters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), III, 351.

²For studies suggesting a direct connection between nineteenth century perfectionist movements and/or American Methodism see the following. H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1937), p. 161f. For a discussion of "the evangelical origins of social Christianity," see Timothy L. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), esp. pp. 148-62. Lee, writing in 1936, says, "it is tempting to find Wesley's influence in the social gospel so characteristic of recent years in England and America. Perhaps the widespread interests of Methodists in social reform is a transfer of their belief in individual perfection to a belief in the perfect society. But Wesley's influence here is doubtless rather in the strongly ethical tone of his teaching." Cf. Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville:

which were distinctive Methodist themes.

Wesley's continuing influence on the Methodism of the 1960's is difficult to determine. It may be, however, as indicated in the introduction, that the current renewal of interest in Wesley's writings may indicate that the needs of the present world require that the church once again take its tradition seriously. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to (1) summarize Wesley's concept of man as contained in the sermons, (2) analyze Wesley's view in an attempt to distill its distinctives, and (3) suggest what prospects Wesley's view of man might have for the contemporary American Church.

WESLEY'S VIEW OF MAN: A SUMMARY

In keeping with Protestant orthodoxy's view of man, Wesley accepts the idea of (1) man's original righteousness in the garden, (2) his fall--resulting in the complete loss of the moral image of God, (3) God's gracious acts of deliverance culminating in the unique saviourhood

Cokesbury Press, 1936), pp. 304-5. Cf. Emory Steven Bucke (ed.), The History of American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), III, 255f. Edwards thinks that although Methodist theology was originally conceived in political and social conservatism, it contained "essentially liberal" implications which were compatible with the rise in England of the "new industrial classes" and "non-conformity." Cf. Maldwyn Edwards, After Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1935), pp. 37-59.

of Jesus Christ, (4) justification by faith, (5) Christian obedience to God's will, and (6) final judgment followed by some type of reward or punishment.

While the sermons reflect these larger motifs, at the same time they left up concepts which were generally recognized as being peculiarly "Methodist." These concerns revolve around (1) man's freedom and responsibility to choose the right, (2) the personal assurance by the Spirit of one's having been accepted by God, (3) the present possible perfectibility of every believer, and (4) to a lesser extent, but strongly implied in Wesley's view of Christian perfection and at times preached specifically, the social nature of Christian experience. By being peculiarly "Methodist" I mean these topics were of primary interest to Wesley and, as such, represented a trend of thought not generally accepted by the larger English Church of his day.

The idea that man is by nature in some form of rebellion against God is fundamental to Wesley's view of man. His major premise is that man is a sinner; for whose salvation God has lovingly revealed the way of forgiveness through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Although the concept of salvation by faith was integral to the English Church's understanding of the way of salvation, because of the clergy's neglect of this theme it appeared to some that

it was a reflection of Methodist "enthusiasm." This, of course, was largely true regarding the teaching of assurance, that is, that a Christian may have an inner certitude of his relationship to God as that of a son to his father. Such assurance was minimized by some Church of England clergy, but emphasized by the Methodists.

In the main, Wesley did not introduce any revolutionary insights in his preaching on the subjects of original sin and justification by faith. In an attempt to persuade men of the authenticity of these biblical concepts Wesley appealed to his hearer to (1) know himself to be a sinner, (2) become conscious of the reality of God--particularly in the role of Judge, (3) be aware that continuance in sin leads to hell, (4) realize that being a Christian is to participate in the divinely arranged "scheme of things" (the purpose of existence). To this point, Wesley's understanding of the nature of man and his relation to God seem rather typical of the orthodox Protestant tradition.

Wesley's special contribution to the church regarding the nature of man is his estimate of the possibilities of grace for man. For the most part, Wesley was a proclaimer of the grace of God. This aspect of Wesley's view of man, that is, that God's grace can radically change man's essential nature so that it becomes

compatible with a high view of personal holiness and social hope, actually became the motivation for his ministry and the distinctive characteristic of early Methodism. It is best reflected in terms of four areas of thought: (1) man is a free being who is ultimately responsible for his decisions; (2) the extent of restoration possible to man exceeds the damage done to him at the time of the "fall"; (3) that Christian faith partially authenticates itself in relation to the society of men; (4) that the perfecting process continues in life beyond death, at least in reference to man's nature in areas other than those necessitating moral excellence.

In rejecting the calvinistic concept of decrees Wesley affirms that man is a free being in that any meaningful relationship established with God is the result of his own sense of responsibility and choice. At the same time, man is not completely autonomous since all choices for the good are made on the basis of "preventing grace" or natural conscience, for example that enabling grace of God that makes free choice possible. However, Wesley is sure that every intelligent man has been made free by the grace of God to the extent that the naturally-felt incompleteness of life can be complemented by God's saving act in Jesus Christ when accepted by faith. Man is able to accept or reject, or accept and reject, the saving

grace of God, thus assuming ultimate responsibility for his destiny. So, Wesley calls men to decision in the sermons--a decision which they alone can make.

Wesley's optimism concerning man peaks at the point of the degree of restoration possible in God's grace, particularly in this life. Man can be perfect--truly human--relatively speaking in this world, completely so in the next. The love of God in spiritual recreation makes possible a relationship between God and man that was unknown in the garden. Now man can love God as Father and be loved as son. To be thus perfected is to have the image of God restored in man, which means as well to have imparted to one the "mind (virtues) of Christ."

By faith man enters into the life of love, Wesley's predominant theological motif. The Christian life is a perfecting process leading to that point in time when the love of God so fills the heart that it excludes the indwelling tendency to sin wilfully. A tension is also established in the believing life between positive and negative spiritual forces. The positive influence of the ever-enlarging love of God diminishes the force of latent evil in man's moral awareness. The completion of this love awaits the resurrection when the body will be restored as well.

Such perfection--the consistent living in love so

as not to sin deliberately--also has social dimensions. The individual, and to that extent private, blessing of the fulness of love can be injected into the life of society as a whole. This emphasis of Wesley's sermons rests on God's grace, which is sufficient to redeem totally the world of men. The experiential dimensions of this idea brings the Kingdom of God into the corporate life of men. Although Wesley does not spell out the details of a social ethic based on his concept of perfection, yet he is clear that the life of love is social in nature and can be partially incorporated into the social and economic life of man.

Good works, when done in faith, are the proper badge of identification for authentic faith. They are sacramental in nature; the implication being that every earthly activity of the man of faith can be a means of strengthening the grace of God in his own soul and the means of imparting it to others. Christians are men who live redeeming lives in the world. The whole of the Christian experience (conviction, justification, good works, sanctification, glorification) has divine grace as its ground. Wesley is careful to avoid any implication that the spiritual life is maintained or increased by works-righteousness.

Always conscious of the power of individual and

collective evil, Wesley believes that God's saving act in Christ is sufficient to expose and destroy such evil. Men, thus freed, can live in love and harmony in the kingdom of grace until its full manifestation in the kingdom of glory, which, when entered, opens infinite possibilities of personal development to the now fully justified believer (incorporating both initial and final justification). Therefore, it is inaccurate to say Wesley has a low view of evil; rather he has a high view of the grace of God.

WESLEY'S VIEW OF MAN: AN ANALYSIS

Generally speaking, Wesley's view of man is less concerned with the past (man in the garden) than with either the present or the future. This is to say that Wesley is primarily interested in man's present condition, spiritually, materially, and socially, although the present history of man is constantly conditioned by future possibilities (immediate and long-range, positive and negative). That is, Wesley largely assumes the reality of the historicity and impact of the "fall" of the human race as found in Genesis three and proceeds from that assumption to an inquiry into man's present condition stemming from Adam's participation in evil to what God has done in Christ on man's behalf. And, in addition,

the hope of heaven and the threat of hell often act as incentives for man to make proper choices with regard to both individual commitment and acceptable behavior. Thus, Wesley approaches the idea of man's nature and destiny on the foundation that man constantly stands in need of God's grace; a grace that is mediated to man through the historical significance of Jesus' death and resurrection and the continuing influence of the Holy Spirit.

One of the most striking features of Wesley's view of man is the extent to which man can reasonably expect to be delivered from sin in this life. For Wesley, serious commitment tends to manifest itself in the active seeking of the individual to pursue a life of holiness. The extent of holiness possible for man this side of the grave includes the possibility of loving God with the entirety of one's being and the neighbor as oneself (the character of which is already determined by one's total commitment to God). Such love means that the believer's heart has been filled (to its present capacity) with God's own love, the quality of which is known as holiness. On this basis man can live in continued obedience to God within the limits of his capacity for understanding the dimensions of that obedience at any existential moment. Negatively, this means that man is cleansed from, healed of, the presence of "original" sin. Now man is truly man.

He is redeemed to the extent that the image of God is restored. Such grace or love needs now to be continually enlarged and extended through personal devotion and social involvement.

The sermons seem clear that for Wesley the predominant characteristic of Christian commitment is the life of love. The life of love, as a theological motif, is begun with justification and regeneration, expanded with growth in grace, extended to all areas of life (personal, home, church, the "world"), intensified in Christian perfection, and sealed at glorification. To live a responsible life of love, as reflected in the nature of God, the general teachings of scripture, and the life and ministry of Jesus, is the minimum acceptable standard of conduct for Christians. In addition, Christians are expected to increase their love by the use of prayer, fasting, Holy Communion, and all other works of piety. Likewise they are expected to demonstrate this love by doing various works of mercy. The initial confrontation of the Christian with the dynamic of the redeeming love of God leads him to seek holiness as that experience which gives power, enhances virtue, and cleanses from (original) sin.

This life of love can be stunted and eventually lost if not cultivated. It is never itself a momentary

experience totally apart from the process of growth, but as a process it does have peak moments of experience which are usually perceptible by the believer and confirmed by the Spirit. As such, the life of love is always disinterested and socially oriented. Its limits are never reached in this life, and death serves to free the believer from physical and metaphysical restraints to the possibility of unending spiritual growth.

This study has attempted to show that in the main Wesley's sermons emphasize the grace of God, for example, the "good news" of God's disinterested love to all men. Although grace is uppermost in Wesley's thinking, the sermons also reflect his concern for the preaching of judgment and obedience. Wesley's own formula for preaching attempts to keep these aspects of the biblical message in proper tension to each other and, to some degree, to include them in every sermon. It may be surprising to the occasional reader of Wesley to realize how much of each sermon is devoted to the general subject of obedience, for example, the loving response in Christian experience to the redeeming love of God. Generally, the subjects of the sermons deal with the basic areas of grace, judgment, and obedience in such fashion as to stir the hearer to commitment, leaving the details of Christian growth (both personally and socially) to the discipline

of the "society." At best, the sermons are statements of Christian theology and theological ethics which are to be applied by the hearer to the various aspects of day-to-day living. Undergirding the whole maturing process, however, is the grace of God, Wesley's main emphasis in preaching.

Thus, Wesley's anthropology can best be understood in relation to Christology and soteriology. For Wesley, man is not really man--in the sense of wholeness--apart from God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, who is Himself the real man in the sense that in His nature and life He was not negatively influenced by sinfulness. The possible perfection of man in this life, for Wesley, is seen in terms of the impartation of Christ's righteousness and "virtues" to the man in faith, not the re-creation of man in terms of Adam's original nature (spiritual and physical perfection in an absolute sense). Wesley is a humanist in the sense that he cares for people, individually and in their corporate relationships. His humanism, however, is colored by man's need for which only the salvation provided by God is extensive and corrective enough to restore man's proper relation to himself, to others, and to God.

The "tone" of the theology contained in the sermons reflects a mood of celebration. The sermons are, for the most part, joyous affirmations of the greatness of Christian faith. This general feeling tone in the sermons (the triumph of grace and the life of love) is conducive

to preaching as it has the tendency to lift man from the depths of human existence to the heights of human hope. The sermons of Wesley would naturally be complemented by the hymn of praise and the act of celebration as expressed in the Holy Communion, both of which (hymn and Communion) were of importance in the awakening in England under the leadership of the Wesleys. The sermons are enthusiastic; that is, contagious, for they tend to speak of life and death issues in terms that can be understood. Wesley expects that the faith they inspire will be deepened and shaped by the demands of the "society" and the class meeting.

WESLEY'S VIEW OF MAN: PROSPECTS

According to William Hordern, one characteristic of mid-twentieth century theology is its rediscovery of the doctrine of sanctification, which he broadly defines as "the act of God whereby the forgiven man is made righteous. . . ." ³ He further suggests that "Barth has developed one of the most extensive treatments of sanctification since the work of John Wesley." ⁴ The basic

³William Hordern, Introduction (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 96.

⁴Ibid., p. 99.

"themes" of this new interest in sanctification, for Hordern, are as follows.

It accepts a basically pessimistic view of human nature, but a highly optimistic view of the power of God's grace; it emphasizes the uniqueness of the Christian ethic, and it recognizes that sanctification must be deeply rooted in the church.⁵

Finally, this new optimism revolves around the grace of God, not the ability of man.

Each of the three themes of this new interest in sanctification suggested by Hordern are of special interest to students of John Wesley, for each one reflects something of his own optimism concerning the possibilities of grace for man. As has been shown already, this study indicates that Wesley also holds a low view of human nature and a high view of God's grace. It is the distinctive function of Christian faith to do for man spiritually what he cannot do for himself. Likewise, Wesley is concerned about the proper understanding and outworking of the Christian ethic, an ethic dependent on the process of justification and the life of love. Finally, Wesley sees the life of love as being directly related to the church in its capacity as guide for the Christian life as well as its being an evangelizing force.

It is perhaps true, notwithstanding the close

⁵Ibid., p. 101.

relationship between the new quest for sanctification and Wesley's "life of love," that Wesley's insistence that Christians can become relatively perfect in this world--to the extent that the redeemed man's intention is controlled by the power of divine love with no necessary admixture of evil--is virtually ruled out of the question for most moderns. Although Wesley's concern for Christian perfection has been in the center of the Methodist tradition, yet Methodist theologian Georgia Harkness probably reflects the contemporary mood of many by saying that although John Wesley "apparently" believed in the doctrine, yet it is doubtful that it is really a viable aspect of Christian hope and experience in this life.⁶ Schilling also suggests that there are too many problems with Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection to utilize much more than its broad outline and general implications.⁷

⁶Georgia Harkness, Beliefs That Count (Nashville: Graded Press, 1961), pp. 82-9. Her opinion flows from comments on the statement of faith regarding Christian perfection made at the 1952 General Conference of The Methodist Church by its bishops; a statement in sympathy with Wesley's views.

⁷S. Paul Schilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 58; esp. pp. 75-82. Schilling's strongest argument opposing Wesley's view that Christian perfection can be consummated in a moment is his brief statement that at this point Wesley is at variance with St. Paul. However, one pro-Wesley writer, George Allen Turner, attempts to show the similarity between St. Paul and Wesley with regard to Christian perfection in a book written from research done

However, at the same time, as we have indicated in this study, there is growing concern for holiness in Christian experience, albeit from the perspective of sanctification in a broad sense rather than as Christian perfection in Wesley's understanding. Schilling suggests that a "Christian concern for personal holiness" is valid and stands as a corrective to those theologians who major on justification by faith with little or no attention being given to the desire for holiness or perfection. In making this point, Schilling concludes,

To stress the validity and authenticity of Christian striving for holiness of attitude and life does not mean in any sense to gloss over the glaring imperfections of man or the stark reality of human sinfulness. It does mean to cherish real faith in the positive possibilities for growth in love open to those who, 'rooted and grounded' in the love of God (Eph. 3:17) and upheld by the koinonia of the Christian community, reach out responsibly toward the larger circle of their fellow men. It does not mean belief in the attainment of a finished state in which all possibilities are exhausted. It does mean, as Eric Baker declares, the conviction 'that no limit whatever can be set to what God can accomplish in and through the believer.' This conviction is an important part of the New Testament message. It played a prominent role in the radical Protestant movements of the sixteenth century. It has been a major emphasis of the Wesleyan heritage. In these days of conventional and often anemic Christianity, its rediscovery, reassertion, and demonstration could go far toward revitalizing the Christian witness.⁸

for his Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard University. Cf. George Allen Turner, The More Excellent Way (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1952), pp. 73-119; 181-224.

⁸Schilling, op. cit., p. 230.

It is the contention of this study that Wesley's concern for the life of love with its emphasis on holiness, or the fullness of love, as a partially realizable experience in Christian experience stands in a complementary relationship to at least three strands of contemporary theological and ethical thought: (1) the new humanism, (2) the current reawakening to the significance of the doctrine of sanctification, (3) the ideal of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth--with all of its attending social implications.⁹ These three trends in American Christianity open the door for Methodist theologians to attempt to find new ways of making their tradition speak with fresh meaning to the modern world. To illustrate this, it is not unthinkable that the Wesleyan view of man might constructively combine the social gospel's emphasis on the extension of grace to all the structures of life with the neo-orthodox concern for man's essential sinfulness and come forth with a theology that is based on the seeming paradox of the sinfulness of man and his possible relative perfectability in this life.¹⁰

⁹Cf. Cox's observations on this renewed thrust among younger clergymen (the "new breed") in Harvey Cox, On Not Leaving it to the Snake (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), p. 133f.

¹⁰Along this line see Shinn's discussion of the possibilities of the new humanism in Roger Lincoln Shinn, Man: The New Humanism (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), pp. 156-181.

Still another possibility is the development of a Wesleyan theology of preaching. A study of Wesley's view of man from the standpoint of man's own self-perception, his relation to God, and his relationships with other people would be of fundamental importance to the church as it reevaluates its responsibility to proclaim the "good news" to a modern world. Such a study actually is required of the church in a day when its very existence is seriously questioned. Certainly it would be concerned with the problems of content¹¹ and method,¹² two very real issues in Wesley's thinking.

As was noted in the introduction,¹³ Wesley distinguishes between "essentials" and "opinions" on matters

¹¹Modern Protestant theologians tend to see a direct connection between preaching and the theology of the church. For many the office of preaching (or of proclamation in general) is essential to the church's self-understanding. Cf. Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 36, 311; Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), pp. 220, 223; John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. 416ff.

¹²Cox suggests that the word of freedom in the gospel is best communicated to modern society in terms of man-for-man action and that this method has more appeal than preaching as such. Cf. Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 127f., 245f.; Cox, On Not Leaving it to the Snake, pp. 24-5.

¹³p. 17.

of theology. For him, the acceptance of the broad concepts of original sin, justification by faith, and the life of holiness were not optional to authentic faith and, hence, essentials. However, his "catholic spirit" enabled him to allow others to fill in many of the details of these essentials and to disagree on issues of lesser importance, for example, on opinions. The same general pattern of thinking can be applied to his ethical views. That is, one ethical "essential" would probably revolve around the required social involvement of the life of loving service, for example, while it would be a matter of "opinion" as to some of the details as to exactly how this service was to be rendered. So, the relief of the poor would be a Christian duty, for Wesley, but the best method of doing so would likely be of little consequence to him--so long as the obligation was being discharged in the context of Christian ethics.

Finally, Wesley's overall treatment of the nature and destiny of man has several positive characteristics that recommend it for consideration by the church in coping with the problems surrounding personal commitment to Christ and the social responsibility of faith in the last third of the twentieth century. First, his concept of the life of love is based on a personal encounter with God and is socially oriented. Although Wesley himself did

not develop the social implications of the life of love, yet there is sufficient material on hand to forge a theology that will express the social dimensions of authentic faith in a Wesleyan framework of thinking. As has been suggested, Wesley probably furnishes the church with a model for capturing the best elements of thought from both the conservative and liberal traditions.

Second, Wesley's view of man and the salvation-process provides an adequate minimum theological base for Christian ecumenicity. A third characteristic that flows naturally from our second observation is to view the life of love as normative for Christian faith in its individual and collective aspects. Such love will be understood as being a dynamic force capable of (1) captivating the whole man in this life, and (2) endless development in life after death.

Fourth, Wesley's concept of man is basically what Albert Outler calls a "folk theology."¹⁴ That is, Wesley's theological concerns are developed so as to appeal to the common people. Surely this is one reason why his theology is published largely in the form of sermons, as short digests of the church's understanding of the biblical faith so stated as to bring forth a response from

¹⁴John Wesley, John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. vii.

the reader. Wesley's theology is more concerned with the practical application of the doctrines of Christian faith than their metaphysical or philosophical base. He is a proclaimer, not an apologist.

For lovers of historical theology a study of Wesley can be a personally rewarding task. However, a certain danger lurks in this kind of pursuit; namely, the always-present temptation to bask in the trials and triumphs of a day long past--to yearn longingly for the theological quests and conquests of an age gone forever. But there is an excitement that lies nearby as well, and that is the always-present possibility that rightly understood and rightly interpreted and applied, one's tradition can come alive again, albeit in a new guise and maybe with a new name.

Times change and with that the needs of men are expressed in different ways. Consequently the church must change for, as the history of the creeds show, it must speak to the age in which it finds itself. Wesley attempted to speak to his age and, to this writer's satisfaction, he succeeded, insofar as it is possible for a man with his commission to do. But if he is to speak to the modern church he must speak in the light of modern technology, global conflict, and a church in revolution. This is the calling of those who follow in his tradition. It

was in the spirit of understanding one's tradition and the hope that the past might inform the present that this study was undertaken. The task of translating Wesley's practical optimism regarding man into meaningful categories for modern man is yet to be done.

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A P P E N D I C E S

APPENDIX A

WESLEY'S SERMONS

This list of Wesley's sermons includes only those used for this study. They can be found in Wesley's Works, volumes five, six, and seven. Fifty-three of the sermons can also be found in Sugden's two volume work on Wesley's Standard Sermons. The sermons found in Sugden are marked with an asterisk.

1. Salvation by Faith*
 2. The Almost Christian*
 3. Awake, Thou That Sleepest*
 4. Scriptural Christianity*
 5. Justification by Faith*
 6. The Righteousness of Faith*
 7. The Way to the Kingdom*
 8. The First-Fruits of the Spirit*
 9. The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption*
 10. The Witness of the Spirit*
 11. The Witness of the Spirit (Discourse II)*
 12. The Witness of Our Own Spirit*
 13. On Sin in Believers*
 14. The Repentance of Believers*
 15. The Great Assize*
 16. The Means of Grace*
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17. The Circumcision of the Heart*
 18. The Marks of the New Birth*
 19. The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God*
 20. The Lord Our Righteousness*
 - 21.--33. Sermon on the Mount (series of 13 sermons)*
 34. The Original, Nature, Property, and Use of the Law*
 35. The Law Established Through Faith*
 36. The Law Established Through Faith (Discourse II)*
 37. The Nature of Enthusiasm*
 38. A Caution Against Bigotry*
 39. Catholic Spirit*
 40. Christian Perfection*
 41. Wandering Thoughts*
 42. Satan's Devices*
 43. The Scripture Way of Salvation*
 44. Original Sin*
 45. The New Birth*
 46. The Wilderness State*
 47. Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations*
 48. Self-Denial*
 49. The Cure of Evil-Speaking*
 50. The Use of Money*
 51. The Good Steward*
 52. The Reformation of Manners*
 53. On Eternity
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54. On the Trinity
 55. God's Approbation of His Works
 56. On the Fall of Man
 57. On Predestination
 58. God's Love to Fallen Man
 59. The General Deliverance
 60. The Mystery of Iniquity
 61. The End of Christ's Coming
 62. The General Spread of the Gospel
 63. The New Creation
 64. The Duty of Reproving Our Neighbor
 65. The Signs of the Time
 66. On Divine Providence
 67. The Wisdom of God's Counsels
 68. The Imperfection of Human Knowledge
 69. The Case of Reason Impartially Considered
 70. Of Good Angels
 71. Of Evil Angels
 72. Of Hell
 73. Of the Church
 74. On Schism
 75. On Perfection
 76. Spiritual Worship
 77. Spiritual Idolatry
 78. On Dissipation
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79. On Friendship with the World
 80. In What Sense We are to Leave the World
 81. On Temptation
 82. On Patience
 83. The Important Question
 84. On Working Out Our Own Salvation
 85. A Call to Backsliders
 86. The Danger of Riches
 87. On Dress
 88. The More Excellent Way
 89. An Israelite Indeed
 90. On Charity
 91. On Zeal
 92. On Redeeming the Time
 93. On Family Religion
 94. On the Education of Children
 95. On Obedience to Parents
 96. On Obedience to Pastors
 97. On Visiting the Sick
 98. The Reward of the Righteous
 99. On Pleasing All Men
 100. The Duty of Constant Communion
 101. Of Former Times
 102. What is Man?
 103. On Attending the Church Service
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104. On Conscience
 105. On Faith
 106. On God's Vineyard
 107. On Riches
 108. What is Man? (A second sermon on this topic)
 109. On the Discoveries of Faith
 110. On the Omnipresence of God
 111. The Rich Man and Lazarus
 112. Walking by Sight, and Walking by Faith
 113. The Unity of the Divine Being
 114. The Ministerial Office
 115. Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity
 116. On Knowing Christ After the Flesh
 117. On a Single Eye
 118. On Worldly Folly
 119. On the Wedding Garment
 120. Human Life a Dream
 121. On Faith (A second sermon on this topic)
 122. On the Deceitfulness of the Human Heart
 123. The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels
 124. On Living Without God
 125. On the Danger of Increasing Riches
 126. The Trouble and Rest of Good Men
 127. Free Grace
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128. The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes
129. National Sins and Miseries
130. On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, near
the City-Road, London
131. On the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher
132. True Christianity Defended
133. On Corrupting the Word of God
134. On Grieving the Holy Spirit
135. On Love
136. On Public Diversions
137. On the Holy Spirit

APPENDIX B

THE GENERAL RULES

There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies,--a desire "to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins:" But, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind; especially that which is most generally practised: Such is, the taking the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling; drunkenness, buying or selling spiritous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity; fighting, quarreling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling; the buying or selling uncustomed goods; the giving or taking things on usury, that is, unlawful interest; uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of Magistrates or of Ministers; doing to others as we would not they should do unto us; doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as the "putting on of gold or costly apparel"; the taking such diversions as cannot be used in the same of the Lord Jesus; the singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God; softness, and needless self-indulgence; laying up treasures upon earth; borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

Secondly, by doing good, by being, in every kind, merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all men;--to their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison;--to their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with; trampling

under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that "we are not to do good unless our heart be free to do it"; By doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another; helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only; By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed: By running with patience the race that is set before them, "denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily"; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world; and looking that men should "say all manner of evil against them falsely for the Lord's sake."

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these, we know, his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season: But then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our souls.¹

(May 1, 1743)

¹John Wesley, Works (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), VIII:270-1.